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Incidental Sex Work

Casual and Commercial Encounters in Queer Digital Spaces

Max Morris

December 2018

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Durham University

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Abstract

This thesis provides an overview of the first empirical study of ‘incidental sex work’, a form of casual, occasional, unplanned commercial sex arranged on digital media platforms. Rather than advertising, the (50) young sexual minority men I interviewed agreed to sell sex after being propositioned by (125) older men on social networking sites and smartphone apps. Alongside qualitative interviews including photo-elicitation procedures, a survey of 1,473 Grindr users aged 18 to 28, from major cities across England and Wales, found that at least 14.6% had been paid for sex (8.2% incidentally). Interview participants had diverse experiences of acceptance and discrimination in their coming out narratives, sexual experiences, and social networks. Incidental sex work encounters involved a range of behaviours, including ‘vanilla’ and ‘kinky’ sex acts, forms of emotional labour, and webcamming. In most cases, participants framed their paid sexual experiences as comparable to unpaid sexual experiences. Economic motivations included low or insecure incomes, student debts, and the ability to consume (both ‘essential’ and ‘consumer’) goods and services, while sexual motivations included ‘boredom’, ‘desire’, ‘experimentation’, ‘opportunity’, and ‘thrill’. Almost all of the participants distanced themselves from conventional labels such as ‘escort’, ‘rent boy’ or ‘sex worker’, suggesting that their behaviours were not ‘regular’ or ‘professional’ enough to count, alongside a desire to avoid association with stigmatising stereotypes of sex work as criminal, immoral, and pathological. Most incorrectly believed that their behaviours were illegal, but also argued that state interventions would be ‘pointless’, ‘harmful’, or ‘impossible’. Highlighting historical and contemporary associations between sexual minorities (principally men who have sex with men and women who sell sex), this thesis draws on postmodern theories of class, gender, and sexuality to suggest that the boundaries between casual and commercial sex have become blurred by changing social attitudes and the proliferation of internet technologies, complicating the ubiquity of discourses of despair, sexual identity politics, and regulatory policy approaches.

Keywords: Casual Sex; Digital Media; Queer Theory; Sexual Minority Men; Sex Work

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Chapter One:

Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

On the street where I grew up, there used to be a ‘gay brothel’. The small terraced house was raided by an undercover ‘vice squad’ as part of a wider crackdown on illicit economic activities in the poorest parts of the city. The *Bristol Post* (5 February 2012) quoted one police officer who said, ‘We want to send a clear message that prostitution and selling illegal drugs will not be tolerated in our community’. To the disappointment of another police officer, no arrests could be made that day because, ‘It is only an offence to run a brothel, so our hands are tied. However, we can now pass this address on to our anti-social behaviour team who can execute certain injunctions to try to get it closed’. Without any evidence of coercion mentioned, the words ‘forced’, ‘trafficked’, and ‘underage’ were also used by the police. No statements were provided by the people living and working on the premises. Another curious aspect of this news story was its use of the term ‘gay’ to describe the building, based on an assumption about the sexual behaviours and identities of its residents. As a young sexual minority man, the sensationalism attached to this story—about the private sexual activities of my neighbours—raised several questions. First, who exactly belongs to ‘our’ community, and by extension who ‘will not be tolerated’? Second, what about being paid for sex was considered ‘anti-social’, and thus worthy of state intervention to ‘send a clear message’? Third, what is the relationship between sexual identity and stigma, and how have social attitudes toward these issues changed over time, and across different generations?

Eventually these questions (and others) about the economic, political and social forms of regulation which shape public attitudes, morals, and policy led me to study Philosophy and Politics at an undergraduate level, then Sociology and Social Policy at a postgraduate level. In doing so, I sought to expand my understanding of the empirical, methodological, and theoretical research which has informed understandings of sexual minorities. I was especially interested in how the proliferation of what I term ‘queer digital spaces’ has transformed many aspects of casual and commercial sex in the early twenty-first century. For example, by logging on to almost any social networking site or smartphone app designed for sexual minority men to ‘chat’, ‘date’, or ‘hook-up’ (e.g. Gaydar, Grindr, Hornet, Jack’d, Manhunt,

Scruff, Squirt), you will undoubtedly stumble across profiles advertising sex for sale, either explicitly or implicitly. If the social networking platform does not allow explicit advertising—as both the Apple and Android app stores prohibit—users find innovative ways to infer that sex is on offer. Profile headers using a banknote or diamond emoji may indicate a willingness to be paid for sex, while the term ‘generous’ may indicate a willingness to pay for sex. Such practices occur within a wider digital landscape where suggestive text and emojis are commonly used to communicate sexual availability (e.g. ‘right now’, ‘looking for fun’, ‘open relationship’), desires (e.g. ‘bareback’, ‘kinky’, ‘hung’), and roles (e.g. ‘top’, ‘bottom’, or ‘versatile’; ‘dominant’, ‘submissive’, or ‘switch’). Features of apps such as Grindr—among the most popular of such dating and hook-up apps for sexual minority men—include ‘Send Photo’ and ‘Send Location’, which allow users to assess if and how they want to arrange casual sexual encounters. These platforms also allow sex workers to advertise to thousands of potential clients instantaneously, and for clients to view thousands of profiles, including those of people who do not necessarily label themselves as ‘sex workers’, including the 50 young men I interviewed for this study.

Having had hundreds of conversations with young sexual minority men, through both social research and personal networks, I am yet to meet one who has not been offered money for sex online at least once. In this thesis I introduce the term ‘incidental sex work’ to characterise an emerging form of commercial sexual encounter, where people agree to sell sex online after being propositioned by other users of social networking sites and smartphone apps, without advertising. This doctoral research project is the first to empirically document the experiences of sexual minority men aged 18 to 28 who engaged in incidental sex work, raising new questions for academics, activists, and policy makers who are concerned with the regulation of sexuality in public, private, and digital spaces. Recruiting interview participants online, from major cities across England and Wales including Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Durham, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Southampton, Sunderland, and Swansea, this project also generated a survey of 1,473 Grindr users aged 18 to 28, finding that 215 (14.6%) said they had sold sex at least once, with 121 (8.2%) having done so incidentally. Alongside direct forms of sex work (e.g. anal and oral sex), sometimes the participants performed webcam shows, or engaged in kinky sex acts (e.g. spanking and roleplay) with their ‘clients’. By highlighting the diverse and unexpected, but often ordinary and everyday experiences of those who engage in internet-based incidental sex work, this study poses problems for how we understand key concepts within sex work

research, policy, and campaign literature. However, in this introductory chapter, I outline some of my personal/political engagements with activist and academic networks focusing on sex worker rights and safety, to illustrate how the research questions for this project emerged and evolved.

1.2 The Sex Work Wars

Debates about sex work continue to be shaped within a sharply contested political environment. Therefore, I will begin by describing several of my experiences of what is sometimes called the ‘sex wars’. Shaped by divisions within feminism since the 1970s, it may be useful to understand how and why my views of sex work have been shaped by interactions with those outside of the academy, alongside the research participants for this study. For example, when I was a teenager (before the police raid on my neighbours), I had appeared on BBC One’s live debate show, *The Big Questions* (24 May 2009), where the question being discussed was, ‘Should we legalise brothels?’ While exchanging money for sex is ‘legal’ in England and Wales—when between two consenting adults and in private—a range of associated practices such as brothel keeping, kerb crawling, and public solicitation are criminalised. As the show’s host said, ‘The laws on prostitution in this country are confusing, to say the least’. In the audience, I was seated behind two sex workers who had been invited to share their perspectives. Catherine, a member of the International Union of Sex Workers, argued that ‘decriminalisation rather than legalisation’ would expand human rights and workplace protections for people like her:

Everybody in this room who does not work in the sex industry has the right to share office space, to work in a shop with other people. Women in the sex industry do not have that right. It’s an infringement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of free association, and it contributes to the danger of working in the sex industry.

Alongside few other forms of ‘illicit’ labour (e.g. those who sell psychoactive experiences are criminalised under the Psychoactive Substances Act, 2016), this comment highlighted how social and legal norms are not distributed evenly. After Catherine, asked to explain her motivations for being a sex worker, Rose said:

The money is good, it gives me the freedom to come and go as I please, I can work the hours I want. I can have nice things and not have to work really hard to struggle to pay my bills or my rent.

The host went on to ask Rose if selling sex was ‘soul destroying’, to which she replied, ‘It’s like any job, you get your bad parts and your good parts’. Two former sex workers who had ‘found God’ were also invited to share their experiences. Trudy agreed that it was ‘soul destroying’, and Lucy said, ‘99% of the girls that are working in prostitution are either forced into it, or they’re doing it in absolute desperation, for money, for drugs’. I contributed by saying, ‘I can’t imagine prostitution is any more “soul destroying” than doing a nine-to-five office job, or something that dull and monotonous’, while an activist from the sexual violence charity Object, Anna, argued that sex work ‘is not a normal job’ by conflating it with ‘sex trafficking’ and ‘child prostitution’ (see below). Using an almost entirely different vocabulary, participants in such debates about whether commercial sex is an ‘inherently exploitative industry’ or ‘just a job’ tend to speak past one another. A central concern of this thesis will be the role of changing discourses, narratives, or ways of telling stories which shape how we think about sex work.

Writing in the *Guardian* (19 November 2008), Catherine had previously called on the government to ‘reduce the stigmatisation and social exclusion experienced by sex workers, by actually involving us’ in the policy making process. As a topic explored in this thesis, the social problem of sex work stigma was also something I witnessed several weeks after the debate show had aired. Learning that she too was a neighbour, I bumped into Rose at the end of my street in June or July 2009. At first, not remembering who I was, a look of panic swept across Rose’s face when I said that I recognised her from *The Big Questions*. She explained that since appearing on the show she had experienced both religious moralising and sexual propositions from members of the public. Given that men feel emboldened to harass sex workers in this way, it is unsurprising that many are unable or unwilling to speak openly about their experiences, let alone contribute to decisions made by policy makers which will influence their future rights, representation, and safety.

More recently (18 April 2018), I attended a debate in Parliament organised by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, which asked, ‘Should men have the right to buy sex?’ Highlighting the flawed framing of this debate—about the ‘needs and desires’ of those who buy, rather than the ‘human rights and labour conditions’ of those who sell sex—an audience member commented:

Whatever you do to criminalise our work is going to continue to push us further underground, further away from resources in terms of healthcare, in terms of

housing... and the less likely we are to come to these kinds of events and talk about our needs.

Another sex worker in the audience said that if reducing this form of labour was the goal, ‘this government has to end austerity’. Also commenting on the impact of austerity policies, I said, ‘How do [sex workers] continue to pay the rent, pay for bills, if we take away their source of income—namely, the clients?’ While sex work debates are almost always thought of as a ‘gendered’ issue (focusing on women’s vulnerability to men’s violence), the role of wider economic factors in shaping people’s experiences of, and motivations for, selling sex often remain absent from consideration altogether.

Challenging this omission, alongside assumptions about gender and consent, one of the panellists invited to speak to the Commission was Belinda Brooks-Gordon. Having provided a guest lecture for her module at Birkbeck, University of London on ‘The Missing Figures of Sex Work Debates’ the day before, I was pleased that she responded to a question about the ‘invisibility’ of certain groups by mentioning incidental sex work: ‘Where you’ve got an older, more wealthy man hitting on a younger man, but the younger man says, “No”, then money is offered, and he decides, “Yes”’. This was something which emerged during a two-year consultation by the Liberal Democrats, which led the party to endorse sex work decriminalisation. Brooks-Gordon added that such examples reminded her of ‘the Churchillian quote’ (a 1940s joke often attributed to the Prime Minister of the time):

- Madam, would you sleep with me for five million pounds?
- Well, I suppose, we would have to discuss terms, of course.
- Would you sleep with me for five pounds?
- What kind of woman do you think I am?
- Madam, we’ve already established that, now we are just haggling over the price.

Beyond the dated sexism of viewing one ‘kind of woman’ differently, drawing attention to this well-known quote was a rhetorical device to highlight how ‘consent’ is something which can be, and often is, negotiated between sexual minority men—even where inequalities of age and wealth inform such encounters.

On the other side of the panel was the journalist Julie Bindel, who adopted a more rigid view of consent as something which cannot be negotiated (with money). Six months before this event (10 October 2017), I attended a book launch for *The Pimping of Prostitution*, where she summarised the motivations behind her most recent media campaign:

I began looking at the research for this book with a position, which was that prostitution is inherently dangerous and abusive, a cause and a consequence of women and girl's oppression, and that I really wanted to find out more about how the sex trade lobby operates.

Representing the home constituency of Rose and I (see above), Thangam Debbonaire MP put it similarly during a conference chaired by Bindel at London South Bank University (13 September 2017):

Before I had any thoughts of being an MP, I crossed a line, and there was no coming back. It was a line of understanding, that this is a form of violence against women. Just because not every single act is violent, does not mean the whole thing isn't violence.

Debbonaire joins a growing number of prominent Labour MPs (Diane Abbott, Harriet Harman, Jess Phillips, Sarah Champion, Stella Creasy) who oppose full sex work decriminalisation on the grounds that this will 'harm women and children', a gender essentialist framing which conflates women with vulnerability, and erases many men, trans, and non-binary people from considerations of harm. Discussing how she refutes research challenging this perspective, Debbonaire added, 'I always use a made-up percentage, when I can't remember what the actual one is'. In addition to such forms of 'research' being led by ideology and including made-up statistics, another persuasive device deployed by such politicians is the invocation of hypothetical scenarios in which children's sexual innocence is threatened (see below):

Is it ever, ever, ever going to be okay for your daughter to come home and say, "Mummy and daddy, I've thought about being a doctor, I've thought about being a lawyer, I've thought about being a carer or a nurse, and I've decided that... my heart's desire is to be a sex worker". Is that ever going to be okay? ...Is it going to be on the job centre wall? Is it going to be in careers advice?

As Debbonaire's comments suggest, such an ideology is not amenable to empirical methods of enquiry because sex work is considered an *inherent* form of violence against women and children, 'an abhorrence' which has little to do with agency or economics beyond conspiratorial media campaigns against 'the trade'.

If the economic context in which sex work occurs is considered in such debates, this is often under the guise of a conspiracy involving global health and human rights organisations (e.g. Amnesty International, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Human Rights Watch, UNAIDS). Consider an article by Jody Raphael in *Dignity*, 'Decriminalization of Prostitution: The Soros Effect' (3 January 2018), which accused the founder of the Open Society Foundations, George Soros, of selectively funding organisations to influence courts, the press, and political elites in support of sex work decriminalisation; an article by Janice Turner in *The Times*, 'Paying for Sex is Always an Abuse of Power' (17 February 2018), which suggested that Amnesty International has 'been taken over by supporters of libertarian identity politics who regard prostitution not as a system of sexual abuse driven by economic need and inequality but a personal choice or a sexual identity, like being gay'; or an article by Bindel in *Newsweek*, 'The Great Sex Trade Swindle: How AIDS Campaigners Joined the Fight to Pimp Prostitution' (20 September 2017), which argued that 'the AIDS movement, and the vast amounts of money attached to it, has done more to shape policy, practice and legislation on the global sex trade than any other movement in history'. These opinion pieces have adopted the populist strategy of accusing marginalised minorities of orchestrating a covert campaign of political propaganda, against the interests of an imagined 'majority' (in this case all women), through the invocation of fictional collectives (e.g. 'the gay lobby', 'the trans lobby', 'the Jewish lobby').

1.3 Debates over (De)criminalisation

Earlier this year (4 July 2018), I joined hundreds of sex workers outside the Houses of Parliament to protest a debate taking place inside Westminster Hall on 'Commercial Sexual Exploitation'. Inspired by the research for this thesis (including time spent in the Parliamentary archives), I held a placard which read, 'It's 2018 not 1885, but the "Victim" Narrative Somehow Survived'. Pictured in the *Metro* (5 July 2018), it was captioned with: 'A protester comments on the narrative of the "ideal victim"'. Other protest signs read, 'Ban Poverty not Prostitution', 'Sex Work is Work', and 'Rights not Rescue'. After hearing

speeches from the protestors which emphasised solidarity between sex workers and migrants, single mothers, trans people and other groups, I walked across the road to watch to the debate, during which sex work was framed as ‘abhorrent and wrong’, or the result of ‘abuse, trafficking, slavery, coercive control, intimidation, violence or drugs and alcohol’, while two major themes emerged: ‘gendered violence’ and ‘the fallacy of choice’ (see below). The word ‘debate’ could be replaced with ‘echo chamber’ in this context, given that there was consensus among the speakers from many different political parties (excluding the Greens and Liberal Democrats, who were not present). It was disappointing that no MPs made the effort to cross the road and listen to the hundreds of people gathered outside, whose expertise could and should be informing current policy decisions.

Chair of the ‘All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade’, Gavin Shuker (Labour) began by asking: ‘What do we believe prostitution inherently to be? Personally, I have moved to a position where I feel that it is a form of violence against women and girls; it is institutionalised exploitation for profit’. He added, ‘I am going to talk in gender terms, because this is a highly gendered phenomenon’. Supporting this view, Jess Phillips (Labour) said, ‘There is a significant parallel between domestic violence and prostitution’, and Carolyn Harris (Labour) said, ‘There is no argument other than that prostitution is violence against women and girls, and we must always fight to protect women and girls from living a life of violence and abuse’. She added, ‘Prostitution is violence against women and girls. Each time a woman is met by a purchaser to trade a sex act for money, drugs, food or some other commodity, she is in a potentially life-endangering situation’. Similarly, Jim Shannon (DUP) said, ‘Without the demand for paid sex, there would be no need for a continuing supply of women tricked, bullied, or forced by circumstances into prostitution’, and Angela Crawley (SNP) said, ‘As we have heard, prostitution is a form of gendered violence. It is both a cause and a consequence of sexual inequality’. Also framing the debate as an issue of ‘violence against women’, Fiona Bruce (Conservative) said, ‘The argument that women—it is mainly women—who are engaged in prostitution and being paid for sex are consenting is a fallacy. They are never consenting; they are coerced’. Others agreed that ‘consent’ was not possible in sex work encounters on the basis that people’s ‘choice’ is constrained by a range of factors. For example, Angela Crawley (SNP) said, ‘There is sometimes a false element of choice, but the majority of people who have been exploited through the sex trade were highly vulnerable before they entered’, and Michael

Tomlinson (Conservative), said ‘that “choice” is often driven by poverty, addiction, or abuse’. Fiona Bruce (Conservative) added:

As we have heard, circumstances in early years—such as homelessness, family breakdown, problems with drugs or alcohol, or being in local authority care—are often precursors to young people entering prostitution, which then becomes a trap for years... On one occasion I was told about a young girl who had been rescued. One day she had decided she would count how many men had abused her that day. After 100 she stopped counting.

The perceived scale of this ‘heinous’ and ‘horrific’ violence was repeatedly emphasised. For example, describing it as ‘a sexual abuse scandal’, Sarah Champion (Labour) said:

We need to recognise that there is a crisis of commercial sexual exploitation in this country. The trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable women and girls around the UK to be sexually abused is taking place on an industrial scale... For too long, Parliament has turned a blind eye to the suffering and societal carnage that these men create.

Conflating sexual exploitation and trafficking with all forms of sex work, she said, ‘96% of victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls’, before adding:

We can extrapolate that the average victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation is raped anywhere between 2,798 and 6,828 times. Those rapes are committed by men who pay for sex. If we scale that figure up to the 1,185 women referred to the national referral mechanism for sexual exploitation in 2017, we start to see the scale of the problem.

As someone familiar with the sociology of sex panics (and moral panics more generally), the persuasive devices being used by these politicians were clear: 1) large statistical claims which cannot be easily falsified; 2) hyperbolic language which frames the issue as a threat to social norms; 3) a totalising perspective of the problem as an unmitigated ‘horror’, erasing any possibility for complexity or nuance; 4) the construction of a stereotypical ‘victim’ (i.e. women/girls) and ‘perpetrator’ (i.e. men/internet companies); and 5) presenting a simple policy solution to resolve the ‘scandal’, positioning themselves as ‘saviours’ to the ‘vulnerable’.

In this case, the policy proposal advocated is known as the ‘Nordic Model’ or ‘Swedish Model’, under which men who pay for sex are criminalised, but—in theory more than practice—criminal offences directed towards women who sell sex (such as soliciting) are abolished. As Gavin Shuker (Labour) summarised:

We have to shift the burden of criminality away from women who are exploited in the sex trade and place it where it belongs: on those who create the demand. The end-demand approach is often referred to as the Nordic Model or the sex buyer law. This three-pronged strategy involves criminalising paying for sex, decriminalising selling sex, and providing support and exiting services for people exploited through the sex trade.

In this debate, the Nordic Model was explicitly associated with a wider crackdown on internet platforms which facilitate commercial sex. As Gavin Shuker (Labour) added, ‘It is currently illegal to place a call card advertising prostitution in a phone box, yet apparently it is perfectly legal for companies to make millions of pounds by knowingly hosting prostitution adverts online’, and Sarah Champion (Labour) said:

Commercial sexual exploitation is happening on a staggering scale, and prostitution procurement websites, where women are advertised to sex buyers, are key enablers of it. A buyer can go to sites such as Vivastreet or Adultwork, casually search for women in his area and contact the mobile number provided to arrange an appointment. It is quick, easy, and highly profitable for the web companies.

In the conclusion chapter of this thesis, I will return to this policy proposal to examine how the experiences of young men who sell sex incidentally in digital spaces challenge multiple premises underpinning this debate. Something interesting about that day, however, was how (despite obvious disagreements) the arguments made by both protestors outside and politicians inside Parliament tended to frame sex work as both a ‘gendered’ problem and a response to restricted economic choices. Although one group calls for full decriminalisation, and the other partial decriminalisation (or a shift in the focus of criminalisation), there appears to be overlap in the discursive norms and rhetorical devices which frame the terms of debate more generally. Although I cannot claim to hold a ‘neutral’ stance on these issues, one aim of this thesis will be to interrogate such norms. The Government’s spokesperson, Victoria Atkins (Conservative) summed up the debate by saying, ‘I understand why colleagues are anxious to act immediately, but I have to act on the basis of academic research

and evidence’, pointing to an ongoing review by the University of Bristol, commissioned by the Home Office, which this research may contribute further evidence to in 2019.

1.4 Terminology

Language is a key ‘battleground’ in the debates over commercial sex described in the previous two sections. Illustrating this, when ‘speaking on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government’, Victoria Atkins was interrupted twice for using the term sex worker:

V. Atkins: We have provided more than £2 million to organisations supporting sex workers, including the £650,000 from the violence against women and girls service transformation fund that we have given to the police and crime commissioner of Merseyside to provide a victim-focused service for sex workers—

J. Phillips: Prostitutes.

V. Atkins: And prostitutes who are victims of, or at risk of, sexual or domestic violence, abuse, exploitation or human trafficking. I have used both words deliberately through my speech.

S. Champion: Only one is correct.

V. Atkins: Forgive me. In that case, may *Hansard* note that when I have said “sex workers”, I was referring also to prostitutes, and vice versa. I do not want to fall over on the language.

Relatedly, Ronnie Cowan (SNP) said, ‘While gathering my thoughts for the debate... I discovered that two groups of people on the same side of the debate disagree about language and terminology. Experience tells me that, as a man, I am walking on eggshells’. Sometimes it is clear to see where a person stands by the terminology used to characterise buying and selling sex. On the one hand, labels including ‘abolitionist’, ‘prohibitionist’, ‘carceral’ and ‘radical’ feminist characterise the view that sex work is coercive, degrading, and exploitative of women. The first two labels invoke history as a tool of persuasion, where abolitionism reminds us of the successful campaigns to end the African slave trade, but prohibition reminds us of failed attempts to control drug consumption in America. While ‘radical’ has been applied to both the ‘pro-sex’ and ‘anti-sex’ sides of this feminist divide, it remains the

most recognisable term. As can be seen from the above quotes, radical feminists tend to use adjectives such as ‘prostituted’ or ‘rented’ to suggest that something is being done to, rather than being done by, sex workers. This strategy has also been adopted by interest groups, politicians, and police through terms including ‘forced’ and ‘trafficked’—also linked to the concept of ‘modern slavery’. The words ‘abuse’ and ‘trauma’ are also routinely used to characterise *all* forms of commercial sex, with little room provided for differences of experience or interpretation. On the other hand, labels including ‘sex-positive’, ‘intersectional’, and ‘queer’ characterise the perspective that sex work is not (always) coercive, degrading, and exploitative, and can include a diverse range of actors and behaviours: male, trans, and non-binary genders; webcamming, kinky, and other non-penetrative sex acts. It has become difficult to avoid implicitly ‘choosing’ a side through this dualism of terminology. For example, do we call the men involved in arranging and buying sex ‘punters and pimps’ or ‘customers and colleagues’, or should we avoid the compulsion to label altogether?

The words used to describe individuals, groups, and ideas are important for constructing their meaning. *Queer theory* offers one example of how significant labelling can be through its affirmative reclamation of an historical term of abuse. If queer meant ‘strange’, by embracing the label such theorists began to question who counts as ‘normal’, and how this shapes society. Relatedly, the sexual identity label ‘gay’ has now generally replaced the (medical and legal) term ‘homosexual’, contributing to changing public perceptions of sexual minorities. Sex worker rights activists are engaged in a similar struggle for meaning and recognition, calling for the more affirmative term ‘sex worker’ to replace antiquated, derogatory, and patriarchal labels such as ‘prostitute’ or ‘whore’. Much like queer theory, postmodern feminism has grappled with misogynistic terms of abuse such as ‘bitch’, ‘ho’, and ‘slut’, including *whore feminism*, which seeks to displace the meaning and regulatory power of this word by reclaiming it. This perspective is contested by radical feminists such as Thangam Debbonaire (Labour) who only used the phrase ‘ironically, because for me it is not a form of work like any other’. Within this dispute are deeper questions about what we mean by key concepts including ‘identity’, ‘labour’, and ‘rights’, often used with the prefix ‘sexual’. This thesis contributes to such debates by asking: Can something ‘incidental’ be counted as a form of work? Do those who sell sex incidentally identify with labels such as ‘escort’, ‘rent boy’, or ‘sex worker’? What are the implications of labelling for debates within sex work policy more broadly?

To clarify how I will use terminology in this thesis, as a queer feminist, my politics are broadly aligned with sex-positive understandings of sex work which favour full decriminalisation. That said, I am sceptical of some aspects of this ‘liberal’ approach if it fails to recognise economic and other structural inequalities which may restrict people’s choices. Recognising that everything is ideological, I have chosen to be up-front about my own involvement in protest movements, political debates, and media campaigns so that the rigour of this research project is understood as existing within a (still) highly contentious political climate. I use the term ‘sex work’ or ‘incidental sex work’ for two additional reasons. First, I support the principle that marginalised groups and individuals should be referred to by terms of their choosing, not those which activists or academics seek to apply to them. While some radical feminist campaigners may have past experiences of selling sex, most currently practicing sex workers prefer this label to others. Second, the term sex work encompasses a wider range of practices than most others, including escorting, massage, pornography, webcamming, kink and BDSM (bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, sadomasochism). No other label captures this diversity of paid sexual behaviours, connecting them under an umbrella term, much like ‘trans’ can be used to capture a diversity of gender expressions and identities. For simplicity, I also use the term ‘clients’ to refer to the men who paid the participants of this study. As will become clear, however, the limitations on language—and thus thought—imposed by the sex work ‘wars’, dominant policy discourses, and research protocols may be unhelpful for making sense of hidden populations who avoid labelling themselves within such paradigms altogether.

1.5 Beyond the Binary

Alongside this study, recent research projects in England and Wales have drawn attention to the expanding role of the internet in sex work practices. For example, at the start of this year (23 January 2018), I attended a launch event for *Beyond the Gaze*, a major study into the ‘working practices, regulation and safety’ of online sex workers. Introducing the conference, Teela Sanders said, ‘There’s been a really rapid change in how sex work is organised and operates... so now, for many sex workers, it is only the digital’. Their study involved in-depth interviews with sex workers (62) and police representatives (56), online surveys of sex workers (641) and support organisations (49), alongside ‘the largest database of customers in the world’ (1, 323) using digital platforms:

The use of online and digital technology has become the mainstream. We can't give it a number, we can't give it a percentage, all the questions that the media asks, we can't answer those. How many? We don't know. It's very difficult to work it out.

Somebody will, come up with something, but it will be wrong.

Sanders highlighted how policy concerns have changed, with a reduction in violent crimes, but an increase in online harassment and 'concerns about privacy'. Another recent study was the *Student Sex Work Project*, which surveyed 6,773 British students, finding that 4.8% had been involved in the sex industry, with most selling sex on an irregular basis online. Missing from both of these surveys, however, was an entirely hidden population—the focus of this study. Contributing to a rapidly expanding body of research, the participants of this study shared many features in common with those described by the research projects above, including high levels of educational capital, and the use of internet technologies to sell sex in innovative ways.

The *Beyond the Gaze* conference also gave a platform to sex workers campaigning for decriminalisation such as Niki Adams, spokesperson for the English Collective of Prostitutes, who highlighted how the internet has allowed them to reach a wider audience to push 'for health, for labour rights, but also to transform the power relation between us as sex workers, with the police, with professionals, with the authorities'. Returning to the theme of language (see above), she added, 'We're not "victims", we're workers, and we're not "clients", we want to be colleagues'. Similarly, Laura Lee explained her motivations for launching a judicial review of Northern Ireland's Human Trafficking and Exploitation Act 2015, a law based on the Nordic Model mentioned in the Parliamentary debates above. Several weeks later, Lee's unexpected death resulted in the judicial review being suspended. An obituary in *The Times* (26 April 2018) captured Lee's wit in responding to personal attacks during this process: 'I became a sex worker to throw off the stigma of working in banking'. Putting sex worker safety, labour rights, and social inclusion at the heart of their messages, these campaigners challenge the prevailing assumption that sex workers need to be 'saved' by support groups, the police, or researchers.

This perspective was shared by Pia Poppenreiter, the CEO of digital platforms for 'paid dating' such as Peppr and Ohlala, when I interviewed her (3 April 2015): 'What you find in the media is this victim portrayal, this poor little prostitute on the street who's a victim of a pimp, which is maybe—if at all—one aspect of a market that is huge'. Based in Berlin,

Peppr was only able to operate from a handful of European countries which allowed explicit advertising, while Ohlala had to carefully market itself to avoid censorship. Until recently, most forms of (indirect) online sex work have managed to avoid regulatory interference. Writing about webcamming for *The Conversation* (10 January 2017), Rachel Stuart highlighted that ‘unlike pornography or prostitution, there are virtually no laws regulating this form of sex work’. Similarly, *The Economist* (7 August 2014) suggested that the internet has made ‘the sex industry harder for all governments to control or regulate, whether they seek to do so for pragmatic or moralistic reasons’. In part, this is because internet-based sex workers are less visible and more mobile than those working from a fixed location. From webcam shows to sugar dating, social media platforms have provided new ways for both professionals and amateurs to sell sex, providing greater autonomy and security, often without clearly defined legal barriers. Given that incidental sex work is (or was, until now) a completely hidden activity, the results of this research further contribute to understanding the difficulties of regulating private transactional sex in the digital landscape.

When I began this doctoral research project, I was more of a digital utopian than I am today. I believed that the internet had a democratising effect, giving a voice to traditionally marginalised minorities, allowing us to connect with each other socially and sexually. Over recent months, however, we have witnessed the sale of private user information by sites such as Facebook entrench inequality and undermine democracy; the sharing of sensitive private information, including HIV status, with third parties by apps such as Grindr; and increased efforts to regulate sexuality online, whether in the form of ‘porn filters’ which led Internet Service Providers to restrict access to sexual health sites; an amendment to the Communications Act 2003 which banned the depiction of a range of consensual sex between adults, justified as forms of ‘child protection’; or platforms such as Tumblr introducing a ban on ‘adult content’ this month. Relatedly, the association between sex work, exploitation, trafficking, and underage sex has contributed to significant legislative changes and police crackdowns in the United States, where many popular sites and apps used by sex workers are based. For example, in 2015, six members of staff and the CEO of the site RentBoy were arrested as part of an FBI raid in New York, and this year, the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex-Trafficking Act (SESTA) became law. While FOSTA and SESTA were intended to target specific sites such as Backpage, they have implications for a range of general-purpose sites including Craigslist, Facebook, Google, Reddit, Tumblr, and WordPress, where a creeping censorship of sexual content has restricted the ability of sex

workers to advertise or sell products and services. Many of these sites were mentioned by the participants of this study, alongside fears of surveillance or exposure, suggesting that incidental sex work may also be affected by such forms of criminalisation and censure. This in turn raises ethnical questions about whether this thesis should be published, in case it draws attention to an otherwise unseen, and thus unregulated, set of (typically) benign sexual behaviours.

Alongside providing new ways to think about the intersection of casual and commercial sex in queer digital spaces, the emergence of incidental sex work challenges many of the fixed categories which have come to define perspectives in sex work research and policy debates (see above). Adopting postmodern theories of class, gender, and sexuality, this thesis will interrogate key concepts such as ‘exploitation’, ‘liberation’, ‘identity’, ‘labour’, and ‘rights’, alongside binary understandings of sex, work, and sex work as empowering/oppressive, voluntary/coerced, indoor/outdoor, public/private, male/female, etc., with implications for legal and social theory.

1.6 Chapter Outline

In Chapter Two, I introduce a stage model to provide an overview of the research and policy literature concerning sexual minorities, focusing on the parallel social construction of men who have sex with men (‘homosexuality’) and women who sell sex (‘prostitution’) as immoral, unnatural, deviant, victimised, and pathological, alongside more recent trends towards identity politics and understandings of sex work as a form of labour comparable with others. Following the Moral Model (1850-1900), Inversion Model (1900-1950), Deviance Model (1950-1975), Liberation Model (1975-1985), Medical Model (1985-1995), and Social and Economic Model (1995-2005), I introduce the ‘Social Media Model’ (2005-present) based on—among other studies—the recent research projects mentioned above. I suggest that the currently dominant paradigm for sex work research is centred on the role of digital media, issues of surveillance, social and sexual inequalities, and the blurring of traditional boundaries, something at least partly due to the recent proliferation of internet technologies.

Divided into three parts, Chapter Three turns to theories of class, gender, and sexuality, which have each taken a ‘postmodern turn’ over recent decades. Drawing attention to the symbolic economy, intersectional feminism, and queer theory, this chapter draws on Foucault’s concept of normative discourse to suggest that the models described in Chapter

One impose limitations on how we can conceive of sex work, identity politics, and social progress. Here, I highlight multiple concepts which emerged in the results chapters, such as cultural hegemony, symbolic violence, emotional labour (in Part I), gender performativity, intersectionality, heteronormativity (in Part II), alongside sexual stigma, stereotypes, and Gayle Rubin's theory of the 'charmed circle' and 'outer limits' (in Part III). I conclude by responding to several critiques of postmodernism, including its vocabulary, understanding of power, and epistemological claims.

Continuing with the theme of epistemology, Chapter Four begins by exploring how postmodern feminist and queer theory has shaped perspectives on data collection and analysis. I suggest that this study aligns with a 'queer methodology', something Jack Halberstam calls 'a scavenger methodology', by drawing on a wide range of methods: semi-structured qualitative interviews including photo-elicitation procedures, an online survey, a psychological measure of sexual orientation, and archival research which contributed to the literature review in Chapter Two. This approach breaks with norms of disciplinary coherence and traditional positivism, to explore the experiences of a sexual minority group which has been erased by conventional methods. Outlining the methods used to study incidental sex work empirically, and background details about the 50 interview participants, this chapter also raises issues relating to online participant recruitment, the role of researcher reflexivity, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five looks at how the interview participants understood their 'current', 'future', and 'ideal' sexualities along a nine-point sexual orientation scale, exploring whether they thought of sexual behaviours, identities, and orientations as fixed or fluid characteristics. Here, I also highlight how several participants critiqued the use of this method for understanding their sexuality because the questions it asked about attraction to others were based on a false presumption of sex/gender as binary. Next, I describe the coming out stories of the participants, highlighting how most had positive experiences of being openly gay, bisexual, and queer young men. However, issues of sexual conservatism, homophobia, and heteronormativity were also mentioned by some participants, themes which intersected with class, ethnicity, race, religiosity, and rurality, complicating any straightforward 'social progress' narrative. These experiences also appeared to shape the sexual politics of several participants, who framed themselves as having 'internalised' heteronormativity. Other differences between participants emerged around themes of body shape, race, and masculinity when participants described their Grindr profile photos, and their use of apps and

sites to meet other men for sex generally. This chapter explores the non-commercial sexual experiences of participants, including their first sexual encounters, number of sexual partners, and attitudes towards casual sex.

Chapter Six explores how the participants arranged incidental sex work encounters online, the 125 older men who paid them for sex, and the variety of sex acts they performed for money. Alongside ‘vanilla’ acts such as anal sex, oral sex, mutual masturbation, and other forms of sexual touching, several participants described engaging in ‘kinky’ acts with clients such as spanking, roleplay, and the use of sex toys. Furthermore, 10 participants described being paid to perform webcam shows, which could also be considered a form of (indirect) incidental sex work. Participants also described engaging in forms of emotional labour during the encounters, while emotional connectivity (or the lack thereof) was sometimes considered a factor distinguishing their experiences of casual and commercial sex.

Chapter Seven turns to the economics of incidental sex work, including how much money the participants were paid to perform 358 different direct sex acts, as described in the previous chapter. I explore the economic motivations participants gave for agreeing to sell sex, including both ‘need’ and ‘opportunity’, how they spent the money on ‘essential’ or ‘luxury’ goods and services, alongside sexual motivations for selling sex which included ‘boredom’, ‘desire’, ‘experimentation’, ‘opportunity’, and ‘thrill’. Inverting exploitation narratives (see above), several participants suggested that they had been the ones ‘exploiting’ or ‘taking advantage’ of the men who paid them, instead. However, issues of generational inequality and race fetishization also underpinned these accounts. Almost all participants distanced themselves from conventional sex worker labels such as ‘escort’, ‘prostitute’, or ‘rent boy’ because their behaviours were not ‘regular’ or ‘professional’ enough, alongside a desire to avoid association with stigmatising stereotypes of sex work as criminal, immoral, and pathological. Most participants (incorrectly) believed that their behaviours were illegal, but also argued that state intervention would be ‘pointless’, ‘impossible’, or ‘detrimental’ for a variety of reasons. Those who did sell sex illegally (e.g. in public places or under the age of 18) compared these behaviours to other forms of law-breaking which (they argued) the state has no ability to regulate, such as recreational drug consumption or underage sex more generally.

Chapter Eight draws on the empirical results of this research project to explore shifting social attitudes towards sexuality, including declining homophobia and increasing

sexualisation within contemporary culture; the politics of (partial) prohibition, noting how my perspective on questions about criminalisation, decriminalisation, legalisation, and the complex areas of crossover, have changed during the course of this research; discourses of despair, which limit how sex work can be imagined—narrowly as a form of victimisation, violence, or vulnerability; how incidental sex work can be understood as an exchange of erotic capital for economic capital, between men who possess varying degrees of social privilege; and how incidental sex work aligns with postmodern perspectives to blur the boundaries between casual and commercial sex in the digital age. Finally, I note the empirical limitations to this study, remaining ethical dilemmas about labelling incidental sex work, and future directions for research which this thesis may inspire.

Chapter Two:

A Stage Model of Research and Policy

2.1 Changing Historical Perspectives on Sex

There is a long history of legal, medical, and social research about both sex workers and sexual minority men in England and Wales, where a common legal system unites the two countries. This body of literature has been used to promote a range of policy interventions, alongside influencing charitable organisations, media outlets, and public perceptions of ‘prostitution’ and ‘homosexuality’ more broadly. In this chapter, I develop a stage model approach for understanding sexualities research and sex work policy from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. Each model I propose is tied to a specific historical period, starting with the ‘Moral Model’ (1850-1900), ‘Inversion Model’ (1900-1950), ‘Deviance Model’ (1950-1975), ‘Liberation Model’ (1975-1985), ‘Medical Model’ (1985-1995), ‘Social and Economic Model’ (1995-2005), through to the ‘Social Media Model’ (2005-present). I suggest that there has been a strong historical correlation between the regulation of commercial sex and sexual minority men’s behaviours and identities. Therefore, this chapter will explore the social construction of both ‘the homosexual’ and ‘the prostitute’ as fixed identity categories from the Victorian period, through to ‘queer’ and ‘sex work’ as more inclusive frameworks for understanding non-normative sexualities today. These ‘models’ are presented in a linear manner to highlight key themes clearly, rather than to provide a complete and unified historical account. In other words, this chapter selectively examines key pieces of legislation and research which have relevance to this study of internet-based incidental sex work among sexual minority young men.

Following other researchers who have developed historical overviews of sex work policy, I draw on existing terminology to characterise certain periods including the ‘Moral’, ‘Deviance’, and ‘Social and Economic’ models (Connell and Hart, 2003; Minichiello and Scott, 2014). For example, O’Neill (2010) suggests that there have been three major periods of regulatory reform: the Victorian period following a series of anti-vice campaigns (see 2.2), the mid-twentieth century following the publication of the Wolfenden Report (see 2.4), and a more recent ideological shift towards *neoliberalism* (see 2.6, 2.7, and 3.2.1)—a focus on

individual rights and responsibilities combined with free market liberalism (Sagar and Jones, 2017). Despite the construction of identity labels to characterise women who sell sex ('prostitutes') and men who have sex with men ('homosexuals') occurring in tandem from the mid-nineteenth century (Weeks, 1981), recurring historical connections between these two groups have remained under-investigated (Chateauvert, 2013). As such, I describe several additional periods of significant social change for sex workers and other sexual minorities, including the 'Inversion', 'Liberation', and 'Medical' models, to highlight how these identities have intersected around issues such as gender nonconformity, liberation politics, and HIV/AIDS.

This chapter explicates many of the dominant 'discourses' constructed and promoted by a range of historical texts, including analysis of records from the Parliamentary Archives, including my own and others' analyses of those documents. Discourse is defined here as anything from 'a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se' (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 3; see 3.1). It is important to note that such forms of communication and language have regulated the 'acceptable' standards of sexuality (including for commercial sex) long before this stage model begins. For example, Ashford (2009a) has noted that the law's focus on 'visible forms of sex work' has remained consistent for a surprisingly long time:

Historically, 'stews' or brothels and street-based prostitution came under the close scrutiny of the law, with Edward II issuing a decree in 1310 stating that all brothels in London should be closed. Almost 700 years later, the focus of law remains the same (p. 265).

By comparison, in the early modern period terms such as 'whore' were used in a less restricted way than today, usually to designate women's transgressions based on behaviour, class, or profession. As Augustín (2007) notes:

'Whoring' referred to sexual relations out of marriage and connoted immorality or promiscuity without the involvement of money, and the word *whore* was used to brand any woman who stepped outside current boundaries of respectability. The emphasis was on the behaviour, not the personal identity (p. 101).

When the term ‘prostitute’ emerged in the sixteenth century it was used as a verb (to prostitute) rather than a noun (the prostitute), highlighting an emphasis on action over identity (Grant, 2014). Furthermore, during this period ‘prostitution was a recognized, if not particularly respected profession’ (Otis, 2009, p. 2), and was ‘treated as one of an array of offences to be managed, without any special moralism’ (Augustín, 2007, p. 99). Relatedly, ‘the rise of “male prostitution” as a recognizable pattern of behaviour has been associated with the rise of “homosexuality” as a sexual category and subject of study’, which only occurred after this period (Kaye, 2014, p. 38). For example, Foucault (1978) documented the emergence of such a ‘singular nature’ (homosexuality), and how it was distinct from earlier conceptions of ‘habitual sin’ (sodomy):

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology... The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (p. 43)

Similarly, the nineteenth century sex worker became reified as an identity category through the Christian lexicon of ‘the fallen woman’, with a range of psychological texts seeking to examine and explain her immoral ‘course of life’ (Acton, 1870). As Rubin (1984) has noted:

Although sodomy statutes date from older strata of the law, when elements of canon law were adopted into civil codes, most of the laws used to arrest homosexuals and prostitutes come out of the Victorian campaigns against ‘white slavery.’ These campaigns produced myriad prohibitions against solicitation, lewd behavior, loitering for immoral purposes, age offences, and brothels and bawdy houses (p. 269).

It is for this reason that my stage model begins in the Victorian period, where such constructions of sexual identity categories and laws to punish them shaped both research and policy following the industrial revolution, generating new social, medical, and moral concerns for urban populations.

2.2 Moral Model (1850-1900)

This stage model begins with a period I describe as the *Moral Model* (1850-1900) because of the ways in which selling sex was framed as an immoral or sinful activity within a deeply religious, patriarchal, and class divided society. While the Victorians are often characterised

as holding a rigidly ‘black and white’ moral view of sexuality (Pearson, 1972), it is important to avoid *presentism*—(re)interpreting the past through contemporary concepts and values. As Lister (2017) notes, ‘we take a certain amount of satisfaction in “othering” the Victorians as repressive, prudish and draconian, especially in matters of sexuality (Sweet, 2001), preferring to think of modern times as sexually liberated’ (p. 1410). Yet many of the perspectives on sex work developed during this period remain relevant today (see 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3), including the framing of sex workers as victims in need of saving, fears about contagious diseases, and laws to police when, where, and how people can have sex. Similarly, themes of identity, masculinity, and stigma which recur throughout this thesis have origins which can be traced to this period (if not earlier).

There is a consensus among many historians of this period that social concerns about sexual trafficking—then the so-called ‘white slave trade’—intensified during the mid to late nineteenth century. Although centred in London (and a handful of other major metropolitan areas in the UK and US), these campaigns ‘produced myriad prohibitions against solicitation, lewd behaviour, loitering for immoral purposes, age offenses, and brothels and bawdy houses’ (Rubin, 1984, p. 139). While some have emphasised the role of religious puritanism to explain this trend (Fisher, 1997), others highlight the influence of legislation such as the Vagrancy Act, 1824, which introduced the term ‘Common Prostitute’ into law and expressed concerns about women’s ‘riotous or indecent’ behaviour in public places. In *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Walkowitz (1982) drew attention to the role of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, under which sex workers (and other women perceived to be ‘immoral’) were routinely subjected to degrading, invasive, and painful procedures of medical examination and police surveillance.

An emerging mass media has also been highlighted as significant during the latter half of this century (Wendelin, 2010). In her analysis of 1,375,810 newspaper articles, Lister (2017) found that the terms ‘prostitute’ and ‘prostitution’ were used increasingly by journalists between 1800 and 1900:

Moreover, we can trace noticeable trends in language that reflect shifting social attitudes. The phrase ‘the great social evil’ is found in less than 1% of all newspaper articles, although it was used widely as a headline. We can see that the term ‘great social evil’ is only in use from the 1850s up to 1900, when it disappears altogether.

Similarly, other Victorian euphemisms for sex workers, such as ‘unfortunate woman’ and ‘fallen woman’, have brief, but sharp, peaks in the 1850s-1900s. This language is thus uniquely Victorian (p. 1428).

Wendelin (2010) argues that ‘there could not have been a better police force’ than the newspapers in Victorian London, operating as a ‘public eye’ of surveillance (p. 56). Of note, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, William Stead used his column ‘to drum up concern over a burgeoning “white slave trade” that never quite turned up to be documented’ (Grant, 2014, p. 102). Stead’s week-long exposé, ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, claimed that women and children were being sold for sex across national borders, ‘creating something of a national panic’ (Lister, 2017, p. 1433), paralleling current debates (see 1.2 and 1.3).

Among the most significant policy interventions of this period were the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. These laws were designed to curb venereal diseases (gonorrhoea and syphilis) in military and naval towns, before expanding to other urban centres. Walkowitz (1982) highlights how the Acts ‘reinforced a double standard of sexual morality, which justified male access to a class of “fallen” women and penalized women for engaging in the same vice as men’ (p. 3). O’Neill (2001) adds that the ‘double standards involved in the language and operation of the law, which stigmatized, criminalized and punished women but not their clients’ rendered the law ineffective, besides being unjust (p. 33). Public awareness of the times and locations of police visitations and examination houses made it difficult for those women brought in to maintain privacy (Pearson, 1972). Furthermore, ‘in a society so profoundly class-bound as that of England, an examining physician would have had to do or say very little to make a registered woman feel worthless and degraded’ (Walkowitz, 1982, p. 202).

Those publishing on the topic of sex work during this period also espoused a moralising view, constructing ‘the prostitute’ as an illicit identity. For example, in his *Lectures on Female Prostitution: Its Nature, Extent, Effects, Guilt, Causes, and Remedy*, Wardlaw (1842) argued that it was the repetition of sex ‘for hire’ which created ‘designations of character’ (original emphasis), which could not be applied to ‘a solitary act’. He added, ‘To form the character, and to justify the designation, there must be the voluntary *repetition of the act*; the giving up of the person to *criminal indulgence*’ (pp. 14-15, original emphasis). Relatedly, the author of *Prostitution, Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*,

Acton (1857) gave evidence to a Select Committee in the House of Lords in 1868, where he argued that the Contagious Diseases Acts would ‘more readily and speedily withdraw girls from their present course of life, and the Church would necessarily have a much greater influence and hold over them’. He recommended that hospitals should introduce wards to segregate ‘the married woman’, ‘the hardened prostitute’, and ‘girls who have committed only one fault’, so that the latter ‘would not become further contaminated by the depravity of other women worse far than themselves’ (House of Lords, 1868, p. 108). Acton (1870) later wrote:

What is a prostitute? She is a woman who gives for money that which she ought to give only for love; who ministers to passion and lust alone, to the exclusion and extinction of all the higher qualities... leaving her a mere instrument of impurity; degraded and fallen she extracts from the sin of others the means of living, corrupt and dependent on corruption, and therefore interested directly in the increase of immorality (p. 166).

Alongside classification systems to distinguish between different types of (‘virtuous’ or ‘fallen’) women, such authority figures expressed concerns about the negative effects of sex work for the moral and medical wellbeing of entire populations (Foucault, 1978).

Perceived as ‘promoting’ sex work by offering treatment for ‘divine punishments’, religious organisations such as the Salvation Army petitioned against the Contagious Diseases Acts, joining feminist campaigners such as Josephine Butler, whose moral and political motives intersected with an emerging women’s suffrage movement (Walkowitz, 1982). As DuBois and Gordon (1984) suggest, the feminist movement during this period was divided between those who ‘asserted that all women, even prostitutes, had a right to the integrity of their own bodies’ and ‘social purity feminists’ whose approach (viewed as ‘rescuing’ or ‘saving’ women) held that ‘if the prostitutes were not contrite, or denied the immorality of their actions, they lost their claim to the aid and sympathy of the reformers’ (p. 38). Again, such fissures remain salient in current debates between different strands of feminism (see 3.3.2).

Over time, such anti-vice campaigns were successful in bolstering support for the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885. Alongside intensifying prohibitions against

commercial sex, section three of this Act, ‘Procuring defilement of woman by threats, or fraud, or administering drugs’, provided a legal defence for coercive or non-consensual sex with any woman labelled ‘a common prostitute or of known immoral character’, while section eleven, ‘Outrages on decency’, criminalised ‘any act of gross indecency’ between two men. Although sodomy could technically carry a death penalty until this point, the law was rarely enforced—given the severity of the punishment—and ‘gross indecency’ encapsulated a wider range of same-sex behaviours than ‘buggery’ (anal sex) alone (Foucault, 1978). Prosecutions rose significantly after the Act was passed, including those of the poet and playwright Oscar Wilde in 1895 and computer scientist and World War Two codebreaker Alan Turing in 1952, alongside thousands of other men who had sex with men, until its repeal in 2003.

Although men buying and selling sex from other men was commonplace throughout the Victorian period (Friedman, 2014; Weeks, 1981), legal interventions focused mainly on women until the Vagrancy Act Amendment Bill, 1898, when men’s commercial sex was explicitly criminalised for the first time:

Every male person who—

(a) knowingly lives wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution; or

(b) in any public place persistently solicits or importunes for immoral purposes,

shall be deemed a rogue and vagabond within the meaning of the Vagrancy Act, 1824, and may be dealt with accordingly.

As Houlbrook (2005) notes, much like section eleven of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, this law was not narrowly interpreted to prevent just commercial sex: ‘the Vagrancy Law Amendment Act (1898) and Criminal Law Amendment Act (1912) introduced the public order offence of “persistently importuning for an immoral purpose,” which attempted to suppress queer men’s use of public space for “cruising” and social interaction’ (p 19). Therefore, laws prohibiting commercial sex were often used to regulate the ‘immorality’ of men’s sex with other men (whether money was involved or not). In other words, the social ‘problems’ which such laws sought to regulate tended to be men having sex with men, and

women selling sex, rather than women having sex with women or men selling sex. This gendered distinction of laws (and their implementation), occurring alongside the parallel social construction of deviant sexual identities, is a topic requiring further consideration.

In 1886, the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing published *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a medical and legal reference book which popularised terms such as ‘sadism’ and ‘masochism’, alongside ‘heterosexual’, ‘bisexual’, and—by association—‘homosexual’. In this text, all non-reproductive sex was considered a paraphilia or perversion: ‘With opportunity for the natural satisfaction of the sexual instinct, every expression of it that does not correspond with the purpose of nature—i.e. propagation—must be regarded as perverse’ (Krafft-Ebing, 1886, p. 79). This perspective resonated with a wider cultural disavowal of ‘sexual excess’, contributing to ‘the belief that sperm ought to be conserved and not squandered’ (Thompson, 2007, p. 113), to the extent that ‘panics about masturbation and prostitution were driven by this anxiety to preserve’ (Walby, 2012, p. 19). As these examples illustrate, it is not possible to examine the regulation of one form of sexual ‘immorality’ in isolation from others—casual, commercial, homosexual, masturbatory, and public sex were all deemed perverse (Rubin, 1984). However, at the turn of the century, the emergence of academic disciplines such as sexology and psychoanalysis began to offer a more secular understanding of sexuality.

2.3 Inversion Model (1900-1950)

By the early twentieth century, discourses of sexuality had begun to be articulated through a more ‘rational’ or ‘scientific’ vocabulary in the writings of figures such as Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud. I describe this period of research and policy as forming the *Inversion Model* (1900-1950) based on the language used by these and other psychoanalysts and sexologists, who adopted the concept of ‘congenital sexual inversion’ to understand homosexuality as ‘sexual instinct turned by inborn constitutional abnormality toward persons of the same sex’ (Ellis and Symonds, 1897, p. 96). In other words, gay men and lesbian women were understood to possess an ‘internal’ psychological gender which did not match with their ‘external’ biological sex—much as trans people are often understood today:

The truth of the invert was inside rather than on the surface; thus a male invert was “really” a woman, and should be allowed to express a female gender, and a female

invert was “really” a man, and should be allowed to dress and live as one (Hovey, 2007).

The *Inversion Model* was less moralising about what was viewed as a natural form of sexual diversity. However, Houlbrook (2005) highlights how this concept was tied to the gender norms of early twentieth century England and Wales, where a ‘rigid distinction between men and women, male and female bodies were assumed to be “sexed” in particular ways. The desire for a woman was considered inherently masculine. The desire for a man was a priori womanlike’ (p. 141). This shaped both research and policy, given that essentialist understandings continued to frame homosexuality as deviant; an ‘aberration’ to be remedied through medical or legal interventions (Walby, 2012).

Sexuality research during this period was also influenced by a focus on commercial sex. As Kaye (2014) notes, ‘prostitutes came to the particular attention of the early sexologists because many of them seemed to lie on a border between “normal” sexuality and the new idea of “homosexuality” that they were formulating’ (p. 39). For example, in *Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*, Freud (1905) drew on male sex workers to challenge the traditional model of sexual inversion, by suggesting that men could be attracted to both femininity *and* masculinity in other men:

If this were not so, how would it be possible to explain the fact that male prostitutes who offer themselves to inverts—today just as they did in ancient times—imitate women in all the externals of their clothing and behaviour? (p. 144)

Similarly, when defining the term in his chapter on ‘Prostitution’ for *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Ellis (1913) concluded:

As, finally, the prevalence of homosexuality has led to the existence of male prostitutes, the definition must be put in a form irrespective of sex, and we may, therefore, say that a prostitute is a person who makes it a profession to gratify the lust of various persons of the opposite or the same sex (pp. 225-26).

While it has been suggested that psychoanalysis represented a break from the biological determinism of sexology, Freud’s focus on sexual drives and the phallus maintained a ‘heteronormative logic’ rooted in fixed categorisations (Walby, 2012, p. 23).

The concept of sexual inversion gained wider recognition through the publication of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, for which Ellis wrote the original foreword.

Hall's novel explored the childhood gender nonconformity and romantic adult life of an upper-class English woman who described herself as an 'invert' after reading the work of Krafft-Ebing, ending with the protagonist pleading: 'Give us also the right to our existence'. The book evoked strong reactions both in support and opposition, including a *Sunday Express* commentator who wrote, 'I would rather put a phial of prussic acid in the hand of a healthy boy or girl than the book in question'. In this example, we see evidence of Foucault's (1978) observation that:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and "psychic hermaphroditism" made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of "perversity"; but it also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (p. 101).

One such social control, exerted in response to Hall's 'tolerance and sympathy for lesbians and all inverts', was by an English court which banned the novel on grounds of obscenity. This was because, as Gilmore (1994) argues, 'the very reasons for which some supported the book—its potential to win greater tolerance—could be construed legally as its tendency to corrupt' (pp. 611-2).

Central to the *Inversion Model*, gender nonconformity influenced how male sex work (and homosexuality more generally) was policed in major cities during the first half of the twentieth century. In *Queer London: Pleasures and Perils in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, Houlbrook (2005) documents how 'queans'—characterised as 'a flamboyant and striking figure... the very embodiment of sexual difference' (p. 7)—were targeted for wearing women's clothing, makeup, and jewellery, as in one example:

'They were,' one officer observed, 'undoubtedly of the Nancy type.' His colleague elaborated: 'They were both powdered and painted... they smelt strongly of perfume and spoke very effeminately. By their behaviour and appearance I believe them to be "West End Poofs"' (p. 139).

The so-called 'West End Poof' was associated with a working-class, immigrant, underground community, where 'a casual tolerance was particularly marked amongst the female prostitutes

who walked the same streets and with whom men forged remarkably strong friendships’ (p. 156). As Quentin Crisp (1968) commented in *The Naked Civil Servant*, it was the ‘thieves, prostitutes and other social outcasts who were my friends’ (p. 91). However, the *Inversion Model*’s conflation of homosexuality with gender nonconformity and commercial sex was unable to account for men who bought and sold sex while displaying a conventional masculinity (Kaye, 2014), as characterised by terms such as ‘rent’ and ‘trade’ (Weeks, 1981):

Despite having “intercourse” with men, these “tough manual workers” neither thought of themselves, nor were thought by others, as anything other than “normal.” Men like this had been identified as a specific category within metropolitan queer life since the late nineteenth century—labeled “renters,” to be had or, most commonly, “trade.” ... So commonplace were such encounters that by the 1930s “trade” simply meant sex (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 169-70).

Although it is impossible to accurately determine how many sexual minority men were arrested for sex work, Houlbrook (2005) notes: ‘Between 1917 and 1957 hundreds of men were imprisoned for sexual or public order offences committed in London’s public, commercial, or residential spaces’ (p. 36). He adds:

The most striking trend, however, was the dramatic intensification in police activity after the Second World War. Between 1942 and 1947 the number of incidents tripled—from 211 to 637, remaining throughout the 1950s twice as high as the interwar level (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 34).

Concerning women’s sex work, key pieces of legislation passed during this period include the Public Places (Order and Decency) Bill, 1928, and the Street Offences Bill, 1929, which continued to single out street-based sex work for policing as immoral behaviour (Laite, 2006).

By the late 1940s, the discipline of sexology was espousing a less essentialist view of sexuality than the concept of sexual inversion had allowed for by recognising that (1) homosexual behaviours were more commonplace than previously considered; and (2) bisexuality and sexual fluidity were features of many people’s sexual experiences. Most notably, Alfred Kinsey’s (1948) study of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* reported that 13% of American men were ‘predominantly homosexual’. This figure was later conflated with his study finding that 7% of American women were ‘predominantly homosexual’ to produce the headline-friendly median of 10% for the whole population (Spiegelhalter, 2015).

Kinsey's research moved beyond binary understandings of sexuality by introducing a six-point scale which documented varying degrees of bisexuality (see Figure 1). As Kinsey (1948) argued, "The living world is a continuum...The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex" (p. 639). However, essentialist understandings of sexuality were not limited to the discipline of sexology, and in the following decades sociological research introduced its own distinctions between 'normal' and 'deviant' sexual behaviours, which I turn to next.

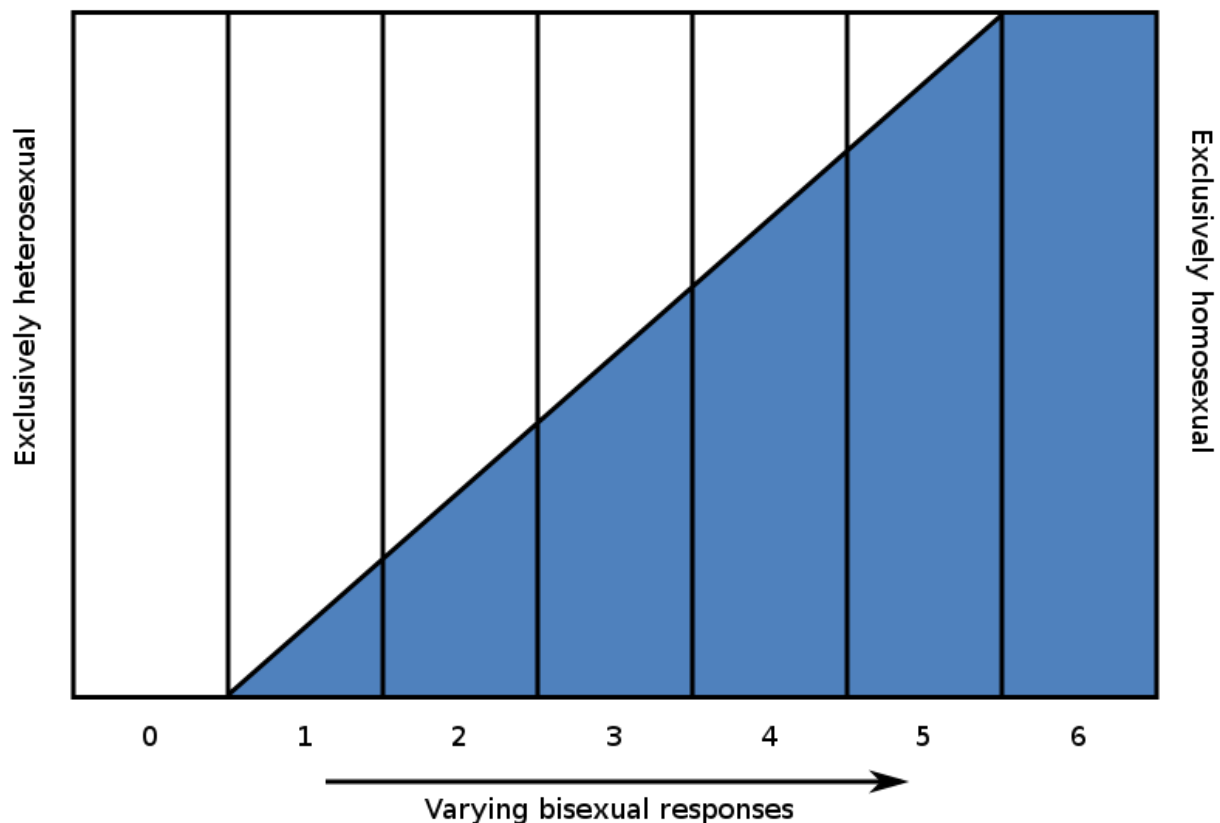


Figure 1: The Kinsey Scale

2.4 Deviance Model (1950-1975)

During the First and Second World Wars, millions of women became essential to the workforce of England and Wales, occupying roles in traditionally masculine industries and services. This significantly shifted assumptions and expectations about gender in the post-war period. As McDowell (2013) describes, women's lives changed during this period from the domestic, local, private spheres of the household, to the public spheres of waged work and political participation:

These changes have in the main been a post-Second World War phenomenon. While something like a third of all women worked for wages for some part of their lives in the century before that war, the numbers began to rise after it, accelerating from the 1970s (pp. 2-3).

According to census data, women's participation in the labour market rose from 36% in 1951 to 50% by 1991, while (among other factors) a combination of direct political action, trade union activism, and anti-discrimination legislation from the early 1970s sharply increased relative earnings compared with men (Bell and Ritchie, 1998)—despite a gender pay gap remaining to this day (Graf, Brown and Patten, 2017). Often characterised as a part of second-wave feminism, this cultural transformation in working relations undermined many of the essentialist gendered assumptions held under the *Inversion Model*, alongside sexist tropes of dependency and domesticity which were reinforced again during the 1950s post-war period. Additionally, the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s began to challenge traditional sexual mores, recognising women's sexual desires beyond functionalist concerns with reproduction (Baumeister, 2004). However, associations between sex work, homosexuality, and sexual deviance during this period also became increasingly rooted 'in the public imagination and embedded in law' (O'Neill, 2010, p. 211). Therefore, I describe this period of research and policy as forming the *Deviance Model* (1950-1975), drawing on sociological research which began to focus on 'deviations' from social and sexual norms.

The most significant policy interventions of this period followed the publication of the *Report on the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* led by John Wolfenden in 1957. The Wolfenden Report recommended that sex 'between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offense', while other activities became recognised as 'homosexual offences' (Moran, 1995). A decade later, this led to the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales through the Sexual Offences Act, 1967. Rather than repealing the offence of 'gross indecency', this legislation provided a legal defence for sex between two men in private; much like the prohibitions against brothels and solicitation still in place today, this meant that any sex which was publicly visible, or involving more than two men, could still be prosecuted. In effect, this 'classically libertarian' construction of the law led to a greater number of arrests for public indecency and crossing age of consent boundaries (then set at twenty-one) meaning that 'even in the early 1990s, more homosexual offences were prosecuted than had been in the late 1960s' (Cocks, 2006, p. 1224). Using the legal construction of 'homosexuality' to conceal or control behaviours

through ‘technologies of examination, schemes of classification, and projects of management and eradication’, Moran (1995) concludes that:

The Wolfenden proposals and the later inclusion of the phrase “homosexual offences” in the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 sought to install these technologies and knowledges in a different context, within the practices through which substantive law is imagined and more specifically through which the (male) body and its desires are both criminalized and decriminalized (p. 21).

Again, parallels can be drawn between this example of partial decriminalisation of homosexuality (counterintuitively) leading to an increase in arrests, and more recent attempts to simultaneously decriminalise sex workers yet criminalise their clients (e.g. the Nordic Model)—with ‘prostitution’ or ‘homosexuality’ remaining illicit more broadly.

At the time, the Wolfenden Report made no attempts to change approaches to commercial sex, with Wolfenden (1957) arguing that the law should only be concerned with how sex work may ‘offend against public order and decency, expose the ordinary citizen to what is offensive and injurious, or involve the exploitation of others’ (p. 80). As Ashford (2009a) has noted:

The Committee was arguing that the focus of the criminal law should be to intervene only where it “directly” affects not the public, but the public good. This would perhaps suggest that street-based sex work, and the high visibility of those women was far more “offensive” than a woman working out of the public’s gaze and consciousness. Quite literally, out of sight, out of mind (p. 260).

Indeed, a perceived increase in the visibility of street-based sex work at the time led to the introduction of the Street Offences Act, 1959, which prompted a police crackdown (O’Neill, 2010). The law (which remains in place, with only slightly different wording) stated:

- (1) It shall be an offence for a common prostitute to loiter or solicit in a street or public place for the purpose of prostitution.
- (2) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds or, for an offence committed after a previous conviction, to a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds or, for an offence committed after more than one previous conviction, to a fine not

exceeding twenty-five pounds or imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months or both.

- (3) A constable may arrest without warrant anyone he finds in a street or public place and suspects, with reasonable cause, to be committing an offence under this section.

As Sagar and Jones (2017) have highlighted, ‘In England and Wales a system of partial criminalisation seeks to “manage” sex work through outlawing a variety of visible activities such as soliciting and loitering in a public place’ under this Act (p. 89). Much like part two of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, which imposed fines of twenty or forty pounds, the inclusion of fines for those suspected of loitering or soliciting enables the criminal justice system to make money directly from the criminalisation of sex work. While the term ‘common prostitute’ has since been removed, this followed unsuccessful attempts to do so in 1967, 1969, and 1990 (O’Neill, 2001). Policy during this period continued to be dominated by an abolitionist paradigm aimed at regulating commercial sex through punitive and exclusionary legal reforms (Scoular and O’Neill, 2007; Weitzer, 2009).

Social research during this period has also been characterised as adopting a ‘deviance framework’ (Epstein, 1994). As Henry (2009) has summarised, ‘sociology of deviance is the systematic study of social norm violation that is subject to social sanction’ (p.1). While the motives of researchers within this paradigm often aimed to demystify and destigmatise sexual minorities, it has been argued that the binary distinction between ‘deviant’ and ‘normal’ it tacitly promoted may have contributed further to conflation between homosexuality, sex work, and other culturally and criminally sanctioned behaviours and identities (Sumner, 1994). As Connell (1992) pointed out, the ‘discourse of homosexuality most familiar to sociologists is the sociology of deviance. In classics of this field, one routinely encounters lists like “alcoholics, mentally disordered persons, stutterers, homosexuals, and systematic check forgers”’ (p. 737). Similarly, Epstein (1994) has noted, ‘authors writing in the “deviance” tradition conducted studies of the local organization of sexuality, focusing (for example) on boy prostitutes and their customers or on the practitioners of anonymous sex in public restrooms’ (p. 191). Clandestine sexual behaviours were of interest to sociologists of deviance because they highlighted the regulatory power of social norms, including ‘the closet’, for policing ostensibly ordinary members of the public (e.g. *Tearoom Trade*, Humphreys, 1970). However, critiques of the deviance model sometimes miss its more radical dimensions, which remain influential for many critical criminological perspectives,

including those which challenge the notion that associations between ‘deviant’ groups is a *regressive* trait; instead calling for solidarity between different groups to challenge normative belief systems. After all, what is so terrible about being associated with people who consume alcohol, are neuro-atypical, or indeed any of the ‘deviant’ identities listed above?

Two years after the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, the Stonewall riots of New York City became a symbol for gender and sexual minority rights movements globally (Gan, 2007). Led by sex workers and trans women of color, including Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. (‘Pay it no mind!’) Johnson, the 1969 protesters were explicitly connected with multiple forms of criminal ‘deviance’ (Kunzel, 2008). As Chateauvert (2014) argues:

The story of one June night in 1969 in Greenwich Village doesn’t often mention how the outlaws and outcasts who patronized the Stonewall Inn made their living. Instead, the mainstream LGBT rights movement prefers a “politically correct” version that celebrates the defiance of “gays” and “lesbians” without mentioning that these queers were also sex workers, transgender people, hustlers, tricks, drug users, and drug sellers (p. 9).

Yet the binary distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ which characterised much of the *Deviance Model* also shaped the trajectory of sexual liberation movements which followed it, with competing political agendas articulated by organisations emerging during the 1970s. As Rubin (2001) has summarised both this period, and what came next (in the US context):

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a period of intense re-examination of interpersonal relationships, marriages, and family life. The social turmoil of the Vietnam war and movements demanding civil rights, Black power, women’s liberation, and gay recognition served as catalysts for the public emergence of what popularly became known as *alternative lifestyles* (p.711).

In the next section, I explore the significance of such ‘liberation movements’ for transforming social and political understandings of sexual minorities.

2.5 Liberation Model (1975-1985)

I describe the period following Stonewall as the *Liberation Model* (1975-1985) because of the ways in which gender and sexual minorities, including sex workers, began to collectively

organise for legal rights, social inclusion, and sexual liberation. Commemorating the anniversary of the riots, New York held its first ‘gay pride’ parade in 1970, while London held its first march in 1972. Although campaign groups existed prior to this through ‘the homophile rights activism of such groups as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis during the 1940s through the 1960s’ (Kates and Belk, 2001, p. 394), new organisations emerged including the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which adopted more militancy in its goals and tactics. Drawing on the radicalism of other forms of identity politics during the 1960s (principally the black civil rights and women’s liberation movements):

GLF saw its mission as revolutionary and set its sights on a complete transformation of society. Not only did it hope to dismantle social institutions such as heterosexual marriage and the bourgeois family, but its leaders also forcefully opposed consumer culture, militarism, racism, and sexism (Bateman, 2004).

However, the legacy of the *Deviance Model* was not far behind, and fractures emerged within the movement, including the place of sex workers in it. In 1973, Sylvia Rivera was booed by attendees when she made it onto the pride rally stage. As Chateauvert (2014) notes: ‘The claim that sex workers led the riots complicates ideas about identity, rights, work, and freedom. Citizenship matters shaped the agendas of gay rights and women’s groups in the 1960s and 1970s, obliging leaders to represent their members as “normal”’ (p. 10). This was part of a broader rejection of left-wing, anti-capitalist, radicalism within gender and sexual minority movements in favour of *respectability politics*—defined as the movement’s ‘focus on marriage equality, full military service, and an end to employment discrimination against gay men and lesbians’ to provide cultural, social, and legal assimilation with heterosexuals (Chateauvert, 2014, p. 11).

As sex work historian Chateauvert (2014) has critiqued, this shift away from radicalism and towards respectability continues to shape much mainstream activism:

The movement’s emphasis on respectability is a form of *whorephobia*, which stigmatizes those who trade sex for money or support; it is a type of sex panic that reflects the deep-seated belief that identity politics and civil rights requires weeding out members for gender nonconformity, sexual deviancy, and drug dependency. (p. 10)

However, such an emphasis on promoting a respectable image also influenced academic understandings away from the *Deviance Model*:

Finally, as gays and lesbians underwent a dramatic conversion in status from a "deviant subculture" to a "minority group," a "community," and a "movement" (Altman, 1982), the "nuts and sluts" approach of the sociology of deviance increasingly seemed misplaced, if not offensive, even to those who understood that "deviance" was not intended as a pejorative term. (Epstein, 1994, p. 197)

Grant (2014) further argues that this form of identity politics was shaped by feminism—'defined by the belief that the personal is political' (p. 23)—to become the dominant framework for sexual minority and sex worker liberation movements during this period. It is also worth noting that many of the key activists involved in sex work research and policy debates during this period belonged to the broader gender and sexual minority movement, from the 'good gays' to the 'bar dykes' (Rubin, 1984).

The early 1970s are also recognised as 'the birth of the modern sex worker rights movement', with the formation of organisations calling for decriminalisation and full labour rights (Grant, 2014, p. 22). In 1973, Margo St. James founded the first such group in San Francisco, Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), whose membership 'struggled over questions of identity, condemning "whore stigma" and the "deviant" label, while lobbying for inclusion in the mainstream women's movement' (Chateauvert, 2014, p. 14). As O'Neill (2001) suggests, this marked an intellectual shift in 'the debate about prostitution away from discourses of sin, sex and crime and places it within discourses of work, choice and civil rights by focusing upon the work of COYOTE' (p. 37). Similarly, in 1975, the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) was founded by two immigrant women in London, inspired by church occupations and protesters in France, 'as an autonomous organization of prostitute women within the International Wages for Housework Campaign' (ECP, 2003). However, much like the gay liberation movement's internal struggles, these organisations 'were part of the explosion of women's groups in the early 1970s as feminism fractured into factions that differed on the primary cause of female oppression and the correct strategy for liberation' (Chateauvert, 2014, p. 23). As Grant (2014) notes, the 'late seventies and early eighties were the heyday of Women Against Pornography (WAP)—a backlash, in many ways, to the increased visibility of sex workers in the women's movement' (p. 87). This divide was characterised by the so-called 'sex wars' of the period, between 'radical' and 'sex radical' feminists (Kotiswaran, 2011); here, figures such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon represented the former, while Gayle Rubin and Wendy Chapkis represented the latter (O'Neill, 2001).

In 1979, Carol Leigh (1997) attended a workshop organised by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media, where she encountered the phrase ‘Sex Use Industry’—illustrative of the radical feminist movement’s perspective that those selling sex were being ‘used’. She asked herself: ‘How could I sit amid other women as a political equal when I was being objectified like that, described only as something used, obscuring my role as actor and agent in the transaction?’ (p. 230). Suggesting that the title of the workshop be changed to ‘Sex Work Industry’, Leigh is credited as having invented the term ‘sex work’, further popularising it through her play, *The Adventures of Scarlot Harlot*, also titled *The Demystification of The Sex Work Industry*, from 1980. Recounting how difficult it was to speak out openly as a sex worker at that time without encountering slut-shaming or stigma, including from her fellow feminists, Leigh (1997) adds: ‘It seemed impossible to break out of this bind without acknowledging that we were all part of some form of prostitution—the “good women” (the girlfriends and wives) and “bad women” (the whores and dykes)—alike’ (p. 229). Here we see a similar problem to the gay liberation movement’s emphasis on respectability politics; the exclusion of those deemed *not* respectable damaging the reputation of the (women’s) liberation movement overall. However, Leigh concludes by noting that since the publication of the book *Sex Work* (Delacoste and Alexander, 1987), the term has become widely adopted, including by international human rights, health, and HIV organisations.

2.6 Medical Model (1985-1995)

The 1980s saw a resurgence in sexual panics about ‘contagious diseases’ with the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic altering perceptions of sexual minority men, sex workers, and other marginalised groups. Nineteenth century fears about the impact of such groups for the population’s health returned (Davies and Feldman, 1999). At this time, researchers began to focus on risk behaviours associated with commercial sex and whether unprotected sex and drug use contributed to the transmission of HIV. I describe this period of research and policy as the *Medical Model* (1985-1995) to highlight how medical discourses—whether sympathetic or pathologizing—influenced perceptions of gender, sexuality, and sex work. Illustrating how fears about HIV influenced perceptions of ‘risky’ sex, a simple search on Google’s Ngram Viewer (a search tool which allows one to see how frequently words were used in published texts recorded by Google’s algorithms) shows how the term ‘safe sex’ was not used in print before 1982, rising rapidly during this period, until the invention of highly

effective antiretroviral therapy (ART) to treat the virus in 1995. Similar trends appear for ‘condom use’ and ‘HIV transmission’ (see Figure 2), highlighting how these themes were culturally connected during the period and, to a lesser extent, still are today.

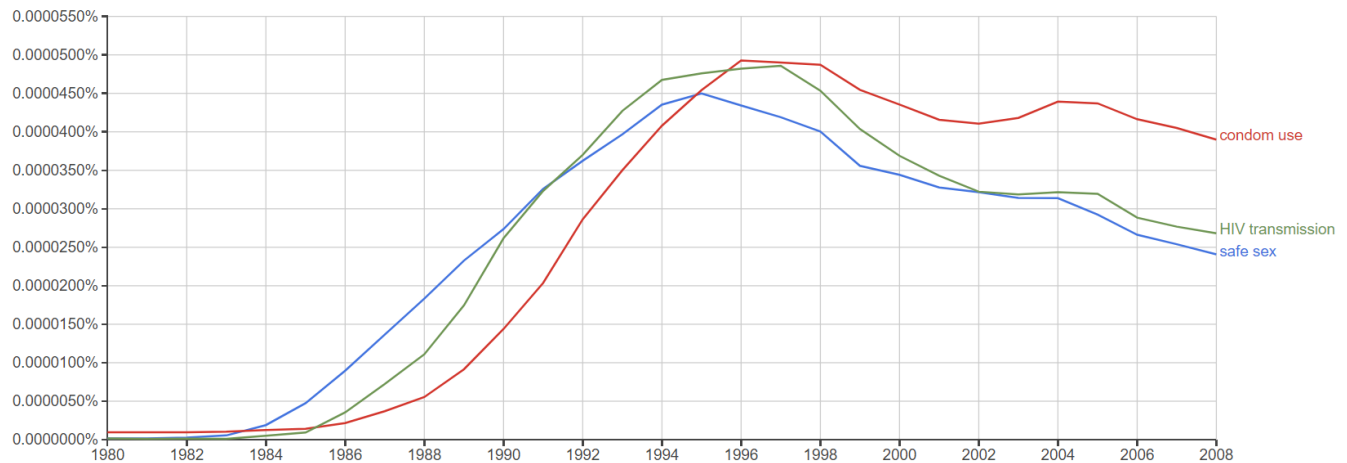


Figure 2: Published ‘Safe Sex’ Terminology Trends, 1980-2008.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic not only intensified fears about sex, but reshaped public perceptions of homosexuality. As tens of thousands of ostensibly heterosexual men began to die from the ‘gay disease’, including people’s colleagues, neighbours, and even celebrities, awareness grew that almost anyone could be ‘closeted’. The epidemic made the existence of large numbers of sexual minority men existing in the population visible (Shilts, 1987). The estimation that 10% of the population was gay, based on a misreading of Kinsey’s (1948) research (see 2.3), gained cultural credibility, further contributing to the social policing of gender nonconformity through homophobia (Pascoe, 2007). Such gender policing also existed *within* gay communities, where gay men’s association with effeminacy was linked to perceptions of people with HIV as emaciated (Weeks, 1991). As Halkitis (2001) has suggested, during this period gay men began to define ‘masculinity in terms of their physical appearance and sexual adventurism. The data indicate that men who possess this ideological stance regarding masculinity seek to remain healthy, appear physically strong, and attract sexual partners’ (p. 413). Homophobic attitudes were further bolstered by Conservative political leaders, whose neoliberal ideology framed HIV as the responsibility of individuals, rather than the state to provide adequate healthcare. British Social Survey data shows that nearly 64% of respondents thought that homosexuality was ‘always wrong’ in 1987, the highest level recorded since the survey began (Kozlowski, 2010). Clements and Field (2014)

confirm this trajectory across 13 different surveys, noting that while public attitudes remained stable after the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1969, ‘when AIDS burst upon the public consciousness in the mid-1980s, anxiety instantly rose’ (p. 526). In response to the perceived inaction, misinformation, and panic, queer protest movements by groups such as the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) gained traction. Eventually, however, the increased visibility as a result of such movements began to improve social attitudes towards people living with HIV, gender, and sexual minorities (Smith, Axelson and Saucier, 2009).

Concerns expressed by medical researchers during this period mirrored those of the Victorian era (Lister, 2017; Walkowitz, 1982; Wendelin, 2010), particularly by suggesting that sex workers were a ‘source of transmission into the respectable community of heterosexual families’ (Scambler, 2007, p. 1080). The association between sex work and HIV transmission was so prominent at this time that researchers made false methodological assumptions. For example, what became known as ‘The Prostitute Study’ of 1986 was based on a broad sample of women, very few of whom identified as sex workers, yet ‘when male AIDS researchers heard about the study to track the virus in women, they assumed the subjects were prostitutes’ (Chateauvert, 2014, p. 83). In other words, when it was discovered that the virus was not exclusive to sexual minority men, those to blame for transmission were assumed to belong to another stigmatised sexual minority group: sex workers. Those who belonged to both categories—sexual minority men who were also sex workers—came under double scrutiny. As one research paper’s title put it, male sex workers were viewed as ‘A Vector for Transmission of HIV Infection into the Heterosexual World’ (Morse et al., 1991). Such fears of transmission from the ‘homosexual’ to the ‘heterosexual’ community not only erased bisexuality (see 5.5), but intensified stigma towards those who had sex with both men and women (Stokes et al., 1996). However, this period does also mark an increased interest in male sex workers, who had been an almost invisible group in the literature until now (Minichiello and Scott, 2014).

The negative stereotyping of sex workers, much like gay men, was met with increased activism and resistance from organisations set up under the *Liberation Model*. As Grant (2014) notes, these groups ‘pushed back early in the AIDS era against the notion that prostitutes were responsible for the illness, rejecting the characterisation of them as ‘vectors of disease’ borrowed from the *Moral Model* (p. 20). This was despite research showing that the majority of sex workers used condoms more consistently than the population in general (Bimbi 2007; Moore 1997; Smith & Seal, 2008). As O’Neill (2001) has noted:

Such data was instrumental in debunking the idea in the public imagination of the dirty, disease-ridden prostitute. It became clear that most women working as prostitutes are very self-conscious of their health needs and are taking precautions against the risk of contracting STDs, including AIDS (p. 33).

Therefore, the ‘(misplaced) fear that sex workers were key vectors in the spread of HIV/AIDS’ was confronted by both research and activism during this period (Scambler 2007, p. 1081). Furthermore, sex work organisations teamed up with international health and human rights organisations such as UNAIDS and WHO to promote sex work decriminalisation (Leigh, 1997). Although I suggest that this research and policy framework began to come to an end with the development of ART in 1995, HIV stigma remains persistent (as directed towards both sex workers and sexual minority men), and the pathologizing legacy of the *Medical Model* continues to be a barrier to providing treatment to people of colour, trans women, and other marginalised groups.

2.7 Social and Economic Model (1995-2005)

Most of the models described above have documented a legacy of research and policy which was ‘marked by a failure to focus on sex work as an organised economic and social activity’ (Connell & Hart, 2003, p. 7). The *Social and Economic Model* (1995-2005) challenged this by offering ways to understand commercial sex as a form of erotic labour, comparable with other socio-economic activities (Chapkis, 1997; Wolkowitz, Cohen, Sanders and Hardy, 2013). Leigh’s (1997) more affirmative label of ‘sex work’ became increasingly adopted within academic circles to replace outdated terms such as ‘prostitution’ (Bindman & Doezema, 1997). This period thus represents a major shift in thinking about sex worker identity politics, marking the intellectual ‘transition from a state of being to a form of labour’ (Grant, 2014, p. 13). As Hardy (2013) notes, ‘Most theorists writing on prostitution and sexual labour now concede that it does constitute a form of work, that is, an exchange of labour for some form of capital or financial gain’ (p. 44). The majority of research within the *Social and Economic Model* has sought to challenge abolitionist policies and reductive understandings of sex work. In *Researching Sex Work in the Twenty-First Century*, Weitzer (2013) argues that, as the quantity and diversity of sex work research expanded under this model, there were three major trends in the literature: (1) increased focus on the *work* aspects of sex work; (2) examination of *under-researched actors* such as male sex workers and

female clients; and (3) the *politicization* of the field, following on from the ‘sex wars’ of the 1970s and 1980s.

Turning to these trends, the *Social and Economic Model* exemplifies an exploration of the *work* of sex work through a growing number of studies examining commercial sex a legitimate form of labour, with its own processes of exchange, exploitation, and fulfilment (Bindman & Doezema, 1997; Weitzer & Ditmore, 2010). Here, parallels were drawn between sex work as an embodied and sexualized form of labour, much like other ‘body work’ such as massage (Wolkowitz, 2002). Considering *under-researched actors* has complemented this research trajectory, with studies highlighting the role of escort agencies, massage parlours, and other ‘managers’ for organising sex work (Perez-y-Perez, 2003; Wilcox & Christmann, 2008)—this may include friends and family members who assist migrant sex workers, often described as ‘traffickers’ (Scambler, 2007)—and a growing body of research into the experiences and motivations of the clients of sex workers (Bernstein, 2001; Brooks-Gordon, 2006; de Graaf et al., 1996; Monto, 2000; Monto & McRee, 2005), trans sex workers (Boles & Elifson, 1994; Kulick, 1998), and male sex workers (Browne & Minichiello, 1996). This body of research has been significant for challenging assumptions and stereotypes about those who participate in commercial sex at all levels.

Concerning policy, O’Neill (2010) has argued that there was a clear shift in interventions from ‘enforcement to welfarism in the policing and regulation of sex workers within the broader context of neo-liberalism’ during the 1990s (p. 215). *Welfarism* is defined as policy focusing on health and safety issues, ‘suggesting widespread support for harm reduction rather than criminalisation’ (Sagar & Jones, 2017, p. 102). Removing gendered language (focusing exclusively on women), the New Labour government’s policy agenda promoted greater equality and individual rights along such lines (Ashford, 2009a). For example, under the Sexual Offences Act, 2003, the language of all sexual offences (including sex work) was made gender neutral ‘by the abolition of certain gender-specific offences, notably the offence of gross indecency which could only be committed by men’ (Bainham and Brooks-Gordon, 2004, p. 266). Despite this, the practical policing of sexual activities remained focused on men’s sexual exploitation of women, where the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act, 2007, and the Police and Crime Bill, 2008, claimed that concern for women’s welfare was the primary motivation for state interference, seeking to criminalise men who bought sex (for the first time) alongside women who sold sex (O’Neill, 2001). While exchanging sex for money remained legal ‘behind closed doors’, there were to be a

range of laws regulating when, where, and how sex work could be performed legally (Ashford, 2009a; 2009b). This included prohibitions on ‘kerb-crawling’, alongside initiatives to ‘educate’ men arrested for such offences. Furthermore, there was a marked shift towards abolitionist policies, ‘with new anxieties about community safety and exploitation joining more long-standing concerns about morality and decency’ (Scoular, Pitcher, Campbell, Hubbard & O’Neill, 2009, p. 30). As Sagar and Jones (2017) suggest, this neoliberal legislative approach utilised ‘social “inclusion techniques” which in truth are much more about “risk management” and “responsibilisation”’ (p. 90). Whether motivated by abolitionism or welfarism, however, Phoenix (2008) suggests that a growing body of research shows that ‘regulating prostitution through criminal justice has a profoundly negative impact on many women’s lives’—whose lives it claims to improve (p. 37).

This period also saw a transformation in attitudes towards sexual minorities, with same-sex couples achieving the right to adopt in 2002, have civil partnerships in 2004, followed by same-sex marriage in 2014 (Clements & Field, 2014). With the respectability politics of gay rights movements achieving many of their stated goals, the association between gender and sexual minorities, and other ‘deviant’ sexual identities (i.e. sex workers), has become less clear—as has the need for political organisation to achieve those goals. However, while the *Social and Economic Model* remains the dominant research paradigm through which sex work is understood, the proliferation of internet technologies and social media platforms has raised new questions for sexualities research and policy, including the emergence of incidental sex work.

2.8 Social Media Model (2005-Present)

The internet has transformed many aspects of sexualities studies, ranging from the visibility of gender and sexual minorities (Gray, 2009; Morris, 2018), to the liberalisation of social attitudes towards sex (Attwood, 2010; Bogle, 2008), to the widespread availability of online pornography (McNair, 2013). These changes have been characterised as part of the process of cultural sexualisation, in which sexual experimentation and diversity have become more visible (Attwood, 2010), and ‘mainstream culture has become more overtly and directly sexual’ (McNair, 2013. P. 12). However, Ashford (2009a) has argued that the role of internet technologies ‘on sex work and the criminal law has been under-discussed whilst that literature which has examined this phenomenon appears dominated by a gendered view of

sex work in which women are cast as “victims” and men as the “oppressors” (p. 259). Since 2005, there has been a proliferation of location-based smartphone applications, or ‘hook-up apps’ (Race, 2015), tailored for sexual minority men such as Grindr, Hornet, Jack’d, Recon and Scruff, alongside applications for people of all genders and sexual orientations, such as Blendr and Tinder—expanding the range of platforms used by sexual minority men which have already been discussed in the literature (Ashford, 2009b; Mowlabocus, 2010). Drawing attention to sexual minority men’s uses of such platforms, Grov and Smith (2014) highlight that as the number of social media platforms has proliferated, so too have spaces for sex work to occur, while increasing the ‘convenience, safety and satisfaction’ of buying and selling sexual services (p. 251). Similarly, Minichiello and Scott (2014) argue that ‘new telecommunications technologies have done much to increase awareness of the diverse and dynamic nature of male sex work... and extended the reach of researchers, just as they have extended the reach of sex workers’ (pp. xiv-xv). These digital spaces include both websites dedicated to commercial sexual services (e.g. AdultWork) and general-purpose social networking sites and smartphone applications (e.g. Facebook). For example, Tyler (2014) has documented the experiences of men using the social networking site Gaydar to sell sex, problematising the distinction between casual and commercial sex (see 6.8 and 8.5). As such, I describe this (most recent) period of academic and policy discourse as the *Social Media Model* (2005-present) because of the ways in which digital media has become central to understandings of sex work (Sanders et al., 2017).

The growing body of research under this model highlights the complexity and diversity of sex work practices, including how they have changed over the past decade. Cunningham and Kendall (2011) argue that digital media has ‘exponentially increased the ability of sex workers to: (a) reach large numbers of potential clients with informative advertising, (b) build reputations for high-quality service, and (c) arrange discreet assignations in which screening methods can be used to reduce the risk of discovery by police and others’ (p. 275). However, in *Sex Work in a Digital Era*, Jones (2015) notes:

To be clear, a “great migration” of sex workers online has not necessarily occurred. The increase of online sex work is not just a reflection of a unilateral move of existing prostitutes from the streets to online environments. Instead, online sex work reflects an expansion of the market of sexual commerce. The Internet has created additional spaces for the sale of sexual goods and services (p. 561).

This *expansion* of both the spaces in which sex work occurs, and the forms it takes, is what distinguishes the *Social Media Model* from previous sex work research and policy frameworks, and what this study contributes to. Jones (2015) has also highlighted nine issues which require further exploration within the field of online sex work research: 1) Sex work \neq prostitution, which draws attention to the diversity of online sexual services, from webcamming to BDSM; 2) The rise of individualised erotic labour, where sex work ‘communities’ may become more fragmented; 3) Context matters, exploring how local geographies shape migration to online spaces; 4) There is still danger on the Internet, to acknowledge how violence and harassment remain present in the experiences of online sex workers; 5) Privacy and the Internet, highlighting the ability of online customers to use internet technologies to record materials, harass, and threaten to ‘out’ sex workers (including issues of ‘capping’ and ‘doxing’); 6) Law enforcement and the future of vice squads, where the state and police services may turn their attention to the regulation of online markets; 7) Gender is not binary, recognising the existence and experiences of trans and non-binary sex workers; 8) The racialization of erotic labor, following research which shows ‘that rent boys are cognizant of ethnic and racial preferences or fetishes and use them to advantage’ (Phua and Caras, 2008, p. 252); 9) Intersectionality, to explore how issues of class, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other characteristics relate to one another in the experiences of sex workers.

A growing body of research has begun to focus on the centrality of social media for understanding contemporary sex work practices. For example, in *Internet Sex Work*, Sanders et al. (2017) documented the results of the *Beyond the Gaze* study—the largest survey of online sex workers and their clients to date (see 1.5)—and suggested that, ‘The diversity of online working practices is reflected in the huge proliferation of online spaces used to facilitate commercial sex’ (Sanders et al. 2017, p. 24). Supporting the inclusivity of the label sex work, they found significant crossover between different forms of commercial sex online:

The webcammers in our survey undertook other forms of indirect sex work, with almost 60% (n = 152) offering phone sex chat services, 23% (n = 58) adult film work and 21% (n = 52) modelling, which includes making and selling self-made videos online. Also, 50% (n = 127) of the webcammers offered direct services as independent escorts, and 38% (n = 96) did BDSM work (p. 17).

This study's sample was also 19% male, and 6% trans, non-binary, or intersex. Nearly 92% of the male respondents identified as gay or bisexual. They note that other studies 'indicate that the proportion of women in the population of sex workers may be overestimated' (see Pitcher, 2015; Sagar & Jones, 2017), and argue that following 'more than a decade of intense prostitution policy and legal reform in the UK, the focus has primarily been on exploitation of women and the role of the purchaser... These narratives fail to reflect diversity in the sex industry' (p. 124). The *Beyond the Gaze* study was also significant for showcasing how the concerns of online sex workers have been neglected by dominant policy approaches, largely ignoring concerns about privacy and surveillance (see 7.7). This large-scale survey also found that internet sex workers were 'comparatively highly qualified (37% (n = 239) were educated to degree level or higher; a further third (n = 212) possessing qualifications to A level or diploma level)' (Sanders et al., 2017, p. 61).

Another major study recently published was the *Student Sex Work Project*, which included both qualitative and quantitative research with students in England and Wales. This project's survey of 6,773 students found that 2.4% of men had been involved in 'direct' sex work (such as escorting) while 3.5% had been involved in 'indirect' sex work (such as webcam shows); this compares to 1.3% of women involved in direct and 2.7% involved in indirect student sex work. This study supports previous research which suggested that nearly 6% of students engaged in some form of commercial sexual activity (Roberts et al., 2012), alongside growing awareness of peer participation in sex work, from 3.4% in 1999 to 25.7% in 2009 (Roberts, Jones & Sanders, 2013). The two most common motivations given for selling sex were 'To fund my lifestyle' (63.5%) and 'I thought I would enjoy the work' (59.0%), while the least common answers were 'I felt forced to' (14.3%) and 'To maintain contact with the world of work' (12.4%). This supports earlier research indicating that lack of disposable income was a principal motivating factor for student sex work, alongside rising living costs and tuition fees (Roberts et al., 2013; Sanders & Hardy, 2014). As Sagar et al. (2016) note, the money made by student sex workers who responded to their survey allowed them to 'avoid debt, cover basic living expenses and fund their lifestyle' (p. 18). On the negative aspects of their work, concerns included 'secrecy', 'negative judgements from friends and family', 'sexual exploitation' and 'fear of violence'—although it seems the fear of violence was higher than actual incidents (Sagar et al., 2016, pp. 13-5).

The expansion of online sex work among students and other young people has also raised new policy concerns. As Grant (2014) argues, 'as the technological innovations

supporting sex work have expanded, they are used to justify new forms of surveillance’ (p. 61). Describing the situation in the U.S. she adds:

Once Craigslist, the world’s largest free classified web site, became a target, sex workers moved to Backpage, a classified ads site owned by Village Voice Media, once the publishers of the venerable alternative newspaper the *Village Voice*. Then the same coalitions of cops, conservatives, and anti-sex work feminists that railed against Craigslist moved on to Backpage, too. At this rate they can just follow sex workers around until there’s no Internet left to advertise on (pp. 63-4).

As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, the same policy approach is now being advocated in the British context, where a recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade claimed that ‘pop-up brothels’—premises rented for short periods through apps such as AirBnB—exist on an ‘industrial scale’, and thus need new regulations (see 1.3 and 8.2).

This study also contributes to the *Social Media Model* by documenting the experiences of young gay, bisexual, and queer men who have been paid for sex after being propositioned on social networking sites and smartphone apps, without advertising or identifying as sex workers. This builds on the suggestion by other researchers that the internet allows ‘men to solicit sex by offering cash for sexual services, whether or not the man he propositioned identified himself as a sex worker’ (Grov & Smith, 2014, p. 251). As Hillin (2015) notes:

Over the past few years, researchers who study the sex economy say they’ve seen a rise in gay men who sell sex on the side like it’s no big deal—and for these men, it’s not. The trend, according to researchers, can be traced to the explosion of social networking sites combined with a less-than-stable job market—along with increasingly permissive cultural views toward casual sex.

Such forms of casual, occasional, unplanned commercial sex challenge many of the assumptions of previous research and policy models. While the *Social Media Model* shares much in common with the *Social and Economic Model*, it offers insights into the *sex* aspects, alongside the *work* aspects, of sex work, exploring how internet technologies have allowed increasing numbers of young men to sell sex as an *unorganised* social and economic activity (c.f. Connell & Hart, 2003).

2.9 Connecting Sexual Minority Men and Sex Workers

It should be noted that this stage model approach to understanding research and policy about sex workers and sexual minority men, and the themes which tie these groups together through history, has followed a somewhat arbitrary narrative structure. Social reality cannot be understood in such a clear-cut or linear fashion as, ‘the *Deviance Model* preceded the *Liberation Model*, which preceded the *Medical Model*’, and so forth. As Hardy (2013) has noted, ‘there is no one, singular, unifying story of the sex industry’ (pp. 44-5). By presenting key trends in the literature through this chronological structure, my goal was to draw attention to several recurring themes over the past century or more, alongside the impact of key historical moments (e.g. The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, the Wolfenden Report, the HIV/AIDS epidemic), which have connected sex workers and sexual minority men, and are of continued relevance for *this* study (see 2.9, 8.1 and 8.3). I have also drawn attention to some of the ways in which sexual identities have been legally, medically, and socially constructed from the Victorian period to today. One of the more surprising features of this history is how intimately woven the identities of such groups are (Weeks, 1981). No story of ‘gay history’ could be complete without a corresponding history of HIV, sex workers, trans people, and others. In Chapter Three, I will expand on the ideas of several influential theorists of gender and sexuality mentioned in this chapter, such as Foucault (1978) and Rubin (1984), focusing on their conceptual contributions rather than chronologic order, and elaborating on several themes which recurred in this chapter such as sexual identity, stigma, and surveillance.

Chapter Three:

Theorising Class, Gender, and Sexuality

3.1 From Modernism to Postmodernism

In writing this thesis, my theoretical perspective on sex work has shifted from a broadly ‘modernist’ or ‘structuralist’, to a ‘postmodernist’ or ‘poststructuralist’ one. This changing outlook not only informed my understandings of class, gender, and sexuality (the three major themes of this chapter), but also the social construction of knowledge and power, discussed further in the following chapter on methodology and in the conclusion chapter. As such, this chapter begins with a brief introduction to ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’, what distinguishes these terms, and how they relate to academic research. After this introduction, Part I will explore the theme of *class* through an analysis of Marx’s definitions of capital, exploitation, and labour, followed by a discussion of the concept of cultural hegemony, feminist critiques of economic essentialism, and how these theories relate to sex work. Part II turns to the theme of *gender*, exploring the cultural construction of the male/female binary, feminist perspectives on sex work which are either gender essentialist and exclusionary or intersectional and inclusive, followed by debates within masculinities studies about the role of homophobia and heterosexism. Part III addresses the theme of *sexuality* through queer theory, turning to Rubin’s model of the ‘charmed circle and outer limits’ of sex, the role of sex work stigma and stereotypes, before proposing an analytical model which explores both the work aspects, and sex aspects, of sex work. I conclude by responding to several key criticisms of postmodernism as a broad theoretical framework. Although this chapter includes many abstract concepts, I will attempt to communicate them as clearly as possible, which should be helpful for making sense of incidental sex work throughout the rest of this thesis by offering a sort of *glossary of terms*. If not immediately obvious, the relevance of each theory will become clearer in subsequent chapters.

The term *modernism* is used here to describe the dominant ideology of the ‘modern period’, particularly from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Following Gramsci (1971), ideology refers to ‘any conception of the world, any philosophy which has become a cultural movement, a “religion”, a “faith” ...implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life’ (p. 634). The ideology of

modernism includes a belief in, and celebration of, the social progress brought about by intellectual and technological innovations over this period. For example, ‘The Enlightenment’ and ‘Industrial Revolutions’ of the eighteenth century are often characterised as examples of modernist ‘advancement’ or ‘progression’ which enhanced many aspects of human life (e.g. food production, industrial manufacturing, healthcare and medicine; greater individual, political, and religious liberties), at least for some. These social changes contributed to a belief in reason and science as the best ways to distinguish truth from myth (Hall, 1996). This belief in the superiority of (traditional) scientific methods is also known as *positivism*, where knowledge is treated as valid only if it can be falsified or verified through rigorous empirical data collection, such as repeated observations or laboratory experiments (see 4.1 for further discussion of the epistemology and methodology of positivism). As a feature of modernism, positivism tends to be dismissive of not only subjective experience, but any claim which cannot be ‘tested’ under controlled conditions. However, positivism has been critiqued by sociologists, given that the narratives of our participants cannot be treated as ‘objective data’.

The term *postmodernism* describes a radical scepticism towards the grand narratives, positivist methods, and binary logics characteristic of modernism. As Lyotard (1979) summarised in *The Postmodern Condition*, this ideology adopts an ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (p. xxiv). Whether such narratives are about the unity of identity categories such as class, gender, or sexuality, the ‘progressive’ development of social and economic structures such as capitalism, or the privileged status of science as the arbiter of truth, postmodern theorists pose critical questions about how knowledge in these domains is produced and interpreted. Depending on where one places the emphasis, postmodernism can be understood as either *post-modern*, in its rejection of modernist assumptions, or *post-modern*, in its adoption of certain core elements of modernism—scepticism towards authority, unevidenced claims, and taken-for-granted assumptions—which it then turns on modernism itself. In particular, postmodernism seeks to challenge dominant *discourses*, ways of communicating which limit what can be imagined possible, including those which hold that science has *all* the answers, that capitalism can solve *all* distributive problems, or that any single political philosophy (liberalism, feminism, socialism, etc.) can answer *all* dilemmas. In short, while adopting (and adapting) many of its methods and principles, postmodernism is a rejection of the ‘religion’ of modernism.

An influential figure in the development of postmodern thought was Foucault, described as both a ‘structuralist’ and ‘poststructuralist’ at various times (Gutting and Oksala,

2018). Foucault's methodological approach, as described in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), examined historical sources to show how 'systems of thought and knowledge' created limitations around what can be conceived as possible in a given period and place (discourse). This method of analysis was adopted in all of Foucault's major works, including *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *Madness and Civilization* (1964), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and (most significant for this thesis) *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Each of these books documented the social construction of 'deviant' identities (e.g. criminal, mental patient, pervert) and the modern institutions set up to discipline them (e.g. asylums, clinics, prisons):

The focus of his questioning is the modern human sciences (biological, psychological, social). These purport to offer universal scientific truths about human nature that are, in fact, often mere expressions of ethical and political commitments of a particular society. Foucault's "critical philosophy" undermines such claims by exhibiting how they are the outcome of contingent historical forces, not scientifically grounded truths. (Gutting and Oksala, 2018)

Drawing comparisons between pre-modern and contemporary societies, Foucault developed a novel interpretation of power; coercive control was not only vertically imposed by ruling elites from the 'top down', but horizontally woven into every aspect of social life from the 'bottom up'. While in traditional societies, *sovereign power* was based on threats of violence or 'the right to *take* life or *let* live', in modern societies this was replaced by *biopower*, where control is exerted through a 'positive influence over life, that attempts to administer, optimise and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and regulations' (Foucault, 1976, pp. 136-7, original emphasis). In part, biopower emerged through the 'progressive' developments of modernity listed above, which had decreased the threat of disease and starvation, increased longevity, and given greater significance to the moral worth of individual lives (through a liberal, rights-based, political philosophy). As Foucault (1976) argued:

Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body. (pp. 142-3)

This shift in the operation of power relied on new methods of *disciplinary control*: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and multiple forms of examination. A

common goal of each method was the maintenance of a ‘normative’ society, under which deviations from social and sexual norms were corrected or reformed. Distinct from traditional methods of ‘judicial punishment’, which merely assessed whether an action was allowed by law or not, behaviours and identities came to be morally judged as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ (Gutting and Oksala, 2018; Rubin, 1984).

In other words, Foucault’s research highlighted how the state no longer needs to threaten its citizens with violence (execution, imprisonment, property seizure), given that subtler methods are now available (as a consequence of modernism) such as ‘the shaping and development of privately deployed, materially based, technological methods of surveillance and censorship’ (Boyle, 1997, p. 190). Lyon (2003) has described this technology of surveillance as ‘a systematic attention to personal details, with a view to managing or influencing the persons and groups concerned’ (p. 1). Gutting and Oksala (2018) add that ‘control over people (power) can be achieved merely by observing them’, or even the mere possibility of being observed, something which digital technologies have contributed to over recent decades. Drawing on Bentham’s panoptic prison design, Foucault (1975) articulated the concept of a *panoptic society*, where the perception of constant surveillance leads to ‘human beings who control themselves through self-control’ (Mathiesen, 1997, p. 230). Sexual and gender minorities have become targets of such surveillance methods because their deviation from social and sexual norms marks them out as ‘other’ (Rubin and Butler, 1994). Whether focusing on ‘the homosexual’ or ‘the prostitute’, modern societies draw attention to the ‘failure’ of certain groups and individuals to adhere to normative expectations, while constructing them as *fixed sexual identities* which are ‘deviant’ (see Chapter Two). Those identified as such are often portrayed through discourses of ‘risk’, whether in terms of deviance (a risk to public decency), pathology (a risk to public health), or even welfarism (at risk themselves); such risks are defined, categorised, and spoken of, until they are feared by the public, then employed to legitimise greater levels of surveillance (Beck, 1992; Deleuze, 1992). Alongside highlighting the significance of digital technologies in maintaining and expanding the reach of such surveillance systems (Boyle, 1997; Mathiesen, 1997), subsequent theorists have drawn on Foucault to trouble the ubiquity of both ‘victimisation discourses’ and ‘liberation discourses’ (Lister, 2017; O’Neill, 2001; Rubin, 1984), which tend to construct identity categories in narrow and exclusionary ways.

As Plummer (1995) noted in *Telling Sexual Stories*: ‘Stories mark out identities; identities mark out differences; differences define ‘the other’; and ‘the other’ helps structure

the moral life of culture, group and individual. Stories are often, if not usually, conservative and preservative – tapping into the dominant worldview’ (p. 178). Plummer distances this perspective from that of Foucault’s, arguing that the ‘coming out’ stories of sexual minorities in the latter part of the twentieth century have been more ‘empowering’ and ‘liberating’ than earlier narratives of pathology and victimisation, contributing to ‘control and domination’ (p. 123). While this perspective is difficult to fault, postmodernism goes further to critique the ‘conservative’ role played by coming out stories themselves, which have tended to privilege white, middle-class, normative experiences—for those with the platform and privilege to tell their stories, and to be heard (see 8.3). In the following three parts of this chapter, I draw on the ideas of theorists who informed, or were informed by, Foucault’s analysis of power, normalisation, and surveillance to explore class, gender, and sexuality.

PART I: Class

3.2.1 Capitalism, Exploitation, and Labour

Marxism is a useful starting point for providing definitions of several key terms in debates about sex work, including ‘exploitation’ and ‘labour’. In Volume I of *Capital*, Marx (1867) introduced the key tenets of *historical materialism*, a theory which described different economic systems, or stages of history, from slave society and feudalism, through to capitalism. Each stage had its own form of ‘class conflict’, where a ruling elite exploited a ruled majority by extracting value from their productive activities. For example, under feudalism this conflict was between those who inherited titles and property rights (lords), and those who performed the agricultural labour to sustain them (serfs); under early capitalism this conflict was between those with the means to purchase labour, land, and property (bourgeoisie), and those compelled to work for them to earn a wage (proletarian). The term class is simply shorthand here for systems of ‘classification’ based on economic relations, or how society is categorised on the basis of uneven distributions of power and wealth. According to Marx (1867), the term labour (or ‘labour-power’) described ‘the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he [*sic*] exercises whenever he [*sic*] produces a use-value of any description’ (p. 77). The *materialism* in Marx’s theory highlighted a concern with studying class conflicts empirically, adopting the modernist vocabulary of science. Indeed, while much of Marx’s writing was abstract, it drew

on empirical evidence to document the dire working conditions and ‘crises’ (e.g. the economic crash of 1857) of nineteenth century capitalism. However, historical materialism was not merely descriptive, it was also predictive and normative, arguing that capitalism would and should be replaced by more egalitarian economic systems (socialism followed by communism), to provide the proletariat with greater control over their labour conditions, political representation, and what Marx called ‘the means of production’.

The means of production included everything from resources (raw materials and manufactured goods) and property (agricultural, commercial, industrial land), to control of an organised labour force. Ownership of these ‘means’ is central to any Marxist definition of exploitation because it is what allows employers to generate *capital*—money accumulated and invested for the purpose of generating more money—by forcing their employees to generate profits, or face the prospect of poverty and starvation through unemployment (Cohen, 1978). As Foucault (1977) argued, Marx’s understanding of the suffering caused by capitalism was novel at the time:

He refused the customary explanation which regarded this misery as the effect of a naturally rare cause or of a concerted theft. And he said substantially: given what capitalist production is, in its fundamental laws, it cannot help but cause misery. Capitalism’s *raison d’être* is not to starve the workers but it cannot develop without starving them (p. 153).

Another concept developed by Marx, to explain how capitalism’s exploitation was maintained, was the ‘reserve army of the unemployed’. This described all those not directly paid for participation in the labour market, and thus unable to unionise to demand greater representation and rights, such as disabled people, young people, and women (Ferber and Lowry, 1976). Keeping large segments of the population unemployed served the interests of capital by creating ‘a reservoir of labour to be tapped in times of boom and labour shortage’, alongside competition *between* workers who had limited income options available to them (Bruegel, 1979, p. 12). As such, the liberal standpoint that labour contracts could be agreed to voluntarily is viewed as illusory under Marxism. Rather, *all* working-class people are exploited, either because the surplus value created by their labour is extracted as profit, or because their unemployed status prevents collective action to overthrow capitalism. Given the cultural and intellectual influence of Marxism within feminist theory (see below), it is

perhaps unsurprising that the term ‘exploitation’ is often invoked as a pejorative to characterise *all* forms of sex work.

Although I will provide several critiques and refinements of ‘classical Marxism’, as summarised above, it should be noted that historical materialism has experienced a renewed interest over the past decade, following the global economic crash of 2008. For example, quoting from the *Financial Times*, McNally (2011) argued:

Among other things, we need to recall that the crisis of 2008 does signal the end of “the world of the past three decades.” It represents the terminus of a quarter-century wave of economic growth—which I shall call the neoliberal expansion—and the transition to a protracted period of slump. It has also opened a new period of social conflict and class struggle (p. 2).

Here, the term *neoliberal* refers to an ideology which holds the ‘free market’ to represent the most efficient distributive system for both public and private services, informing policy throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Neoliberalism is closely associated with the concepts of *consumerism* and *individualism*, as described by sociologists including Bauman (2012), Beck (1992), and Giddens (1991), to characterise aspects of this ideological paradigm which placed emphasis on the role of individual choice and responsibility. As Weeks (1985) has argued, the twentieth century saw a major shift ‘from capitalist accumulation to capitalist distribution, from production to consumption’ (p. 22), which further contributed to the atomisation of identity categories along lines of gender, race, sexuality, etc. (Hall, 1996).

Rather than defining class as a binary between bourgeoisie and proletarian, such a system of classification now tends to be viewed as existing along a spectrum of (lower, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle, and upper) class positions, following the Nuffield model which considered occupation alongside income (Penn, 1981), and more recently the BBC’s *Great British Class Survey* which classified the population using labels such as ‘elite’, ‘established middle-class’, ‘technical middle-class’, ‘new affluent workers’, ‘traditional working-class’, ‘emergent service workers’, and ‘precariat’ (Savage, 2015). The latter term draws attention to the precarious nature of many jobs today, with the emergence of zero-hour and insecure, rather than long-term and secure, contracts. Alongside changing definitions of class, new concerns have emerged about economic inequalities beyond class, including *generational inequality*, which highlights the sense of unfairness felt by many ‘millennials’ (those born after 1980) and ‘centennials’ (those born after 2000), who have fewer prospects

for home ownership, stable income, and savings, than ‘generation X’ (born after 1960) or ‘baby boomers’ (born before 1960), whose generous pension benefits—based on borrowing—will have to be repaid by future generations (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015).

In the wake of economic ‘crises’, or what Harvey (2014) calls ‘moments of transformation in which capital typically reinvents itself and morphs into something else’ (p. 7), the inherent contradictions of capitalism (e.g. monopolies leading to the erosion of competition; low or insecure incomes leading to decreases in expenditure; increasing dependence on credit and debt leading to unsustainable economic bubbles) are brought to light. In the UK context, this ‘reinvention’ included successive governments framing the 2008 crisis as a pretext for harsh austerity measures. Reductions in social security spending, fewer public service jobs (mainly occupied by women), combined with an expansion of insecure and part-time labour—sometimes referred to as ‘the gig economy’—has contributed to the creation of a reserve army of the *underemployed*, more than unemployed. This has allowed governments to claim ‘record’ levels of employment, while the number of people relying on foodbanks to avoid poverty or starvation has also reached ‘record’ levels (Trussell Trust, 2018). These trends have followed a much longer process of deindustrialisation, where ‘the rich reservoir of labouring jobs has all but evaporated’ (Nayak, 2003, p. 146), replaced by service-sector jobs which are ‘routine, subservient, low-paid and often insecure’ (Gunter and Watt, 2009, p. 527). Alongside the striking parallels between these developments and Marx’s nineteenth century investigations, I mention these details because they highlight the current economic context in which sex work occurs.

3.2.2 Cultural Hegemony

Marxism holds that economics and politics cannot be understood as separate forces. Not only do capitalists invest their money to acquire or hire more resources, property, and labour (the economic ‘structure’ of society), but also to influence culture and politics (the ‘superstructure’ built above this economic base). Under classical Marxism, the superstructure was viewed as secondary to the structure, where ideologies were *determined* by the current economic stage of history. As Hall (1986) noted, this approach tended ‘to see all other dimensions of the social formation as simply mirroring “the economic” on another level of articulation, and as having no other determining or structuring force in their own right’ (p. 417). Incarcerated by Mussolini’s regime from 1928, the Marxist intellectual Gramsci (1971)

challenged this economic reductivism in the *Prison Notebooks*. The most influential concept developed here was of *cultural hegemony* (Hebdige, 1999), which provided perhaps the earliest ‘postmodern’ challenge to classical Marxism’s grand narratives of ‘historical necessity’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001):

Gramsci offers a sustained assault on the epistemologies of economism, positivism and the spurious search for scientific guarantees. They were founded, he argues, on the falsely positivistic model that the laws of society and human historical development can be modelled directly on what social scientists conceived (falsely, as we now know) as the “objectivity” of the laws governing the natural scientific world (Hall, 1986, p. 12).

As Bauman (1990) summarised, hegemony describes a ‘monopoly of norms and values’ used to discredit alternative cultures as a ‘morbid, often pathological, departure from the “normal”; a distortion, deviation, or anomaly’ (p. 159). This interpretation is further reflected in Foucault’s argument that ideological norms were ‘the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends’ (e.g. historical materialism), and that ‘where there is power, there is *always* resistance too’—another central aspect of cultural hegemony (Gutting and Oksala, 2018, emphasis added).

Gramsci’s theory was proposed partly as a response to Marx’s failure to predict that, rather than being overthrown by organic socialist revolutions, capitalism continued to expand and maintain popular appeal into the twentieth century, across most of ‘the west’ at least. Hegemony describes the processes through which a dominant social group secures its hierarchical position by gaining the consent of subordinate groups who, despite their similar (economic) status, have been ‘won over by specific concessions and compromises’ (Hall, 1986, p. 15). Importantly, Gramsci ‘insisted that the superstructure is where struggles are fought and won. This inversion of the base/superstructure relationship is his most lasting contribution to Marxist theory’ (Markowicz, 2011). Highlighting the importance of the superstructure, analysis of culture and ideology provided a subtler account of the discursive strategies by which one class maintained its dominant position by influencing others to endorse their rule. Part of what made this theory ‘postmodern’ was the view that class identities cannot be understood as homogenous, singular, or unified. Breaking with the essentialist dualisms of classical Marxism (bourgeoisie/proletarian, economic/cultural, structure/superstructure), Gramsci’s ‘revisionism’ was an important intervention for making

sense of egalitarian (but not strictly class-based) identity politics after the 1960s: black civil rights, gay liberation, second-wave feminism, etc. (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). With the emergence of these movements, hegemony has since been applied to a wide range of other identities and ideologies. For example, Hall (1986) has applied the concept to ethnicity, postcolonialism, and racism, while Connell (1987) used it to explain inequality not only between, but within genders (see Part II for further discussion of hegemonic masculinity theory). If we apply Gramsci's concept to sex work, it also raises questions about whether a unified 'worker' identity can or should be applied to a group as heterogeneous as those who sell sex.

Understanding class as a 'constellation' of groups rather than a 'unified bloc' (Hall, 1986), is also relevant for considering the role of the media in perpetuating myths and stereotypes about sex workers. As Miller (2018) argued it in *The Responsible Guide to Talk About Sex Work in The Media*:

Minorities are relegated to have a voice in peripheral discourses only, and their experiences are lost in the fog like the possibility of finding their own place in the mass media. In other words: those who don't stand under the hegemonic gaze are relegated to oblivion (p. 3).

Lister (2018) adds that 'the process of dehumanising sex workers starts in the media discourses of disposability: the sex worker is dehumanised long before any violence takes place; she is dehumanised in well-meaning articles that write of her work as "obscene" and "degraded"' (p. 1418). Focusing on ideology makes Gramsci's theory useful for making sense of how cultural representations can create stereotypes which, to draw on Foucault's definition of discourse, limit what is conceivable (see 7.6 for further discussion of sex work stereotypes). Relatedly, Lowman (2000) has used the term 'discourse of disposability' to characterise the way policy makers use language to 'eradicate' or 'erase' sex workers from consciousness, and Sanders (2013) has used 'discourses of disrespectability' to explore how clients are constructed in ways which are classed—where 'respectability' is viewed as a middle-class value (see 8.3 for further discussion of 'discourses of despair').

An important aspect of hegemony is that it can be contested in moments of resistance. Such contests include challenging dominant discourses and giving greater significance to the voices of subordinate groups. There is also the possibility of allegiances between different subordinate groups to advance common goals (see 2.9). For example, Grant (2014) has

described moments during the 1970s where a diverse range of activists united to challenge sex work criminalisation and stigma (including women of colour, migrants, and housewives) even when it was ‘hard to conceive of these groups of women as class allies’ (p. 112). In such examples, hegemony ‘transcends the corporate limits of purely economic solidarity, encompasses the interests of other subordinate groups, and begins to “propagate itself throughout society”, bringing about intellectual and moral as well as economic and political unity’ (Hall, 1986, p, 14). Highlighting the significance of cultural representations, not only as determined by class, Gramsci’s interventions are helpful for developing a more nuanced account of sex worker stereotypes perpetuated by the press and within political discourses, alongside how these can be confronted.

3.2.3 The Symbolic Economy

Also breaking with the economic determinism of classical Marxism, Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of the *symbolic economy* provided a sociological framework for understanding class privilege at the cultural level. If we take the primary concern of Marxism to be the uneven distribution of *economic capital*, Bourdieu’s research highlighted how other forms of ‘capital’ could be accumulated, converted, and exchanged to reproduce class stratifications:

Bourdieu expanded [Marx’s] framing through the concept of social “fields,” such as educational institutions, in which people compete for and accumulate different forms of capital. *Cultural capital* describes the nonfinancial assets which promote a person’s social mobility, such as attitudinal dispositions, educational qualifications, speech patterns, or taste in fashion and media consumption. *Social capital* describes the cultural resources available to a person on the basis of belonging to a group, membership of which can be “socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 86). Each of these forms of capital can also be converted into *symbolic capital*, which describes a person’s social prestige within a group, or how the other forms of capital become legitimized by others. (Morris, 2018, p. 1188, original emphasis)

Another reason for Bourdieu’s departure from historical materialism was the changing nature of capitalist production in the century following Marx, particularly concerning the means of production:

Bourdieu, by contrast, was writing in the second half of the twentieth century, when this dichotomous structure had been obscured by, among other things: partial separation of ownership from control of the means of production; the growth of public sector employment; and the emergence of high salary occupations, elevated above manual labour by their dependence upon scarce forms of technical or cultural knowledge. While enormous discrepancies in economic wealth were (and are) apparent, social stratification had become more complex than it was in the nineteenth century (Crossley, 2014, p. 87).

Central to the increasing complexity of understanding classification, in *Distinction* Bourdieu (1984) highlighted the role of *social recognition* of class status through appearance, language, and specific forms of knowledge (e.g. educational capital, linguistic capital, scientific capital). Furthermore, Bourdieu's concepts have had wide appeal in gender and sexuality studies (see 5.6), including my own concept of 'gay capital' which describes insider knowledge of gay cultures and networks in some educational fields; 'erotic capital' which describes the cultural and economic privileges attributed to sexual desirability (Hakim, 2011); and 'gender capital' which describes the prestige given to traditional displays of masculinity and femininity in many social fields (Bridges, 2009; Huppertz, 2012; Risman, 2018). These provide further examples of how class identities have become fragmented in late modernity, as mentioned above (Bauman, 2012; McRobbie, 2009; Savage, 2015), alongside the growing significance of *signs* and *symbols* for providing an adequate account of class inequality in the fields of education, culture, and consumption (Schubert, 2014).

Another important concept developed throughout Bourdieu's research was of *symbolic violence*, the subtle ways in which cultural habits and tastes come to exclude working-class people from participation in socially esteemed activities, events, and institutions. As Schubert (2014) summarises the pervasive and subversive power of symbolic violence:

It is *everywhere* in that we live in symbolic systems that, in the process of classifying and categorizing, impose hierarchies and ways of being and knowing the world that unevenly distribute suffering, and limit even the ways in which we can imagine the possibility of an alternative world. It is also *nowhere* because, in its gentleness and its subtleness, we fail to recognize its very existence, let alone the way it is at the root of much violence and suffering. (p. 192, original emphasis)

As this quote illustrates, symbolic violence is comparable to Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse and power (see 3.1). According to Bourdieu, it can be a 'more effective, and (in some instances) more brutal, means of oppression' than direct force (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992, p. 115). Much like Gramsci's account of 'consent' as necessary for the maintenance of hegemony, Bourdieu's discussion of symbolic violence was concerned with how people are 'invested' in maintaining systems of domination, and how sociology could offer tools to address this (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). Relatedly, Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of symbolic violence began with observations of how western capitalism imposed 'different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable' on colonised populations, not only in economic terms, but in the fields of culture, gender, and education (p. 78). Education systems were a central focus of Bourdieu's research, given their role in socialising students; reinforcing ideologies of *meritocracy* and *individualisation*, under neoliberalism, insofar as academic failure was attributed to intellectual inferiority—individuals who simply needed to 'work harder', even while 'hard work' was framed as unscholarly due to its association with working-class people (Schubert, 2014). Bourdieu (1984) was also interested in the symbolic violence of 'consumer culture', where the categorisation of certain goods and services became associated with class, while the ideology of *consumerism* highlighted how capitalism was more effective at creating desires than satisfying them (see 7.2). Finally, Bourdieu also drew attention to the role of symbolic violence in maintaining gender hierarchy in *Masculine Domination*, something I return to in Part II. Next, I describe other feminist critiques of historical materialism to address the omission of patriarchy from classical Marxist accounts.

3.2.4 Post-Marxist Feminism

The symbolic economy and cultural hegemony could also be characterised as 'post-Marxist' theories given their refinement of certain aspects of classical Marxism—in the same sense that I use the term *post-modernism*, to suggest a significant degree of continuity with modernism. Such critiques highlight the limitations of economic essentialism, while endorsing the central premise that class inequality is unjust. Another post-Marxist intervention came through feminist theory during the 1960s and 1970s:

I don't think one can fully comprehend early second wave feminism without understanding its intimate yet conflicted relationship to New Left politics and Marxist

intellectual frameworks. There is an immense Marxist legacy within feminism, and feminist thought is greatly indebted to Marxism. In a sense, Marxism enabled people to pose a whole set of questions that Marxism could not satisfactorily answer. (Rubin and Butler, 1994, p. 63)

One of these questions was about Marx's definition of 'labour', which tended to neglect women's unpaid work—including domestic, reproductive, and sexual labour—which was necessary for the maintenance of capitalism. For example, Nicholson (1987) argued that Marx's narrow focus on 'productive activity' and 'the economy', treated as separate from 'reproductive activity' and 'the family', contributed to a neglect of gender relations (p. 24). Although Engels's (1884) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* had attempted to address questions about women's status under capitalism, this framing remained rooted in a nineteenth century historical model of marriage, kinship, and the state (see Rubin, 1975). The theoretical contributions of Hochschild in *The Managed Heart* (1983) and *The Second Shift* (1989) were particularly relevant for our purposes. The latter documented how women continued to perform the majority of unpaid labour in private spaces, alongside paid labour in public spaces, challenging the assumption that greater participation in the labour market would expand women's leisure time. The subtitle of the former, 'Commercialization of Human Feelings', emphasised how many women's jobs alienated them from their emotions—much like the alienation of manual labour Marx and Engels had documented—introducing the concept of *emotional labour*.

Whether through the expression or suppression of emotions as 'part of the job', emotional labour describes 'the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*'. Hochschild distinguished between emotional labour, as defined above, and the 'synonymous terms' *emotion work* or *emotion management*, which 'refer to these same acts in a private context where they have *use value*' (p. 7, original emphasis). Emotional labour has become an increasingly necessary skill in post-industrial economies, which have moved away from selling products to services (Gunter and Watt, 2009); under neoliberalism many traditionally 'masculine' jobs (e.g. in mines, factories, farms) have been replaced by more 'feminine' ones (e.g. in the retail and service sectors). Furthermore, a significant body of research has documented the emotional labour involved in sex work, comparable with other service sector jobs (Chapkis, 1997; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998; O'Neill, 2001; Sanders, 2005; Walby, 2012; Wolkowitz, 2002). For example, Sanders (2005) drew on this concept to argue that

‘sex workers create a manufactured identity specifically for the workplace as a self-protection mechanism to manage the stresses of selling sex as well as crafting the work image as a business strategy to attract and maintain clientele’ (p. 319). Similarly, O’Neill (2001) writes that, ‘emotional labour is a central aspect of the women’s relationship with the client and involves them in manipulating, suppressing and falsifying their own feeling life in order to do the intimate work’ (p. 89). Following the feminist mantra of ‘the personal is political’, Hochschild’s studies were important for questioning masculinist assumptions about what labour looks like, *who* performs it, alongside *when* and *where* it happens. In particular, I mention these theoretical contributions because of their relevance to understanding incidental sex work as an ‘unprofessional’ economic and sexual activity (see 6.7 and 7.5).

3.2.5 The Work Aspects of Sex Work

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the dominant research framework today (the Social and Economic Model) has drawn attention to the *work* aspects of sex work (Weitzer, 2009). This body of research has highlighted how many aspects of commercial sex were neglected by previous paradigms (the Moral Model, Deviance Model, Medical Model, etc.), including the notion that sex work could be considered ‘a form of labour like any other’ (see 1.2). Drawing on the concept of emotional labour has been useful here, too, highlighting similarities between sex work and most other jobs today (Chapkis, 1997; Sanders, 2005; Wolkowitz et al., 2013). For example, Grant (2014) has argued that:

Sex work is not simply sex; it is a performance, it is playing a role, demonstrating a skill, developing empathy within a set of professional boundaries. All this could be more easily recognized and respected as labor were it the labor of a nurse, a therapist, or a nanny. To insist that sex work is work is also to affirm there is a difference between a sexualized form of labor and sexuality itself. (pp. 90-1)

Bowen (2015) has also made significant contributions here, by highlighting the ‘dual life’ of those ‘who supplement square work with sex work’ (p. 434), where ‘square work’ refers to forms of labour which are legally, morally, and socially ‘acceptable’, as contrasted with sex work (Rubin, 1984). Relatedly, research with the clients of sex workers has documented a tension between the desire for ‘no strings attached sex’ on the one hand (see Huysamen and Boonzaier, 2015), and ‘authentic emotional connection’ on the other—sometimes characterised as the ‘girlfriend experience’ or ‘boyfriend experience’ (Earle and Sharp, 2016;

Huschke and Schubotz, 2016; Milrod and Weitzer, 2012; Sanders, 2005). This tension has been theorised by Bernstein (2001) as *bounded authenticity*, which describes how paying for sex appeals to many men because it offers the intimacy of relationships, combined with boundaries which ‘insulate’ them from long-term obligations.

In *Sex and Social Justice*, Nussbaum (1999a) asked what—if anything—distinguishes sex work from six other occupations: a factory worker, a domestic servant, a nightclub singer, a professor of philosophy, a health club masseuse, and a ‘colonoscopy artist’ (someone paid to test equipment for internal bodily examinations, the only hypothetical occupation listed, although not unheard of in the context of medical testing). Nussbaum highlighted how each of these jobs is legal and less stigmatised than sex work, despite meeting the exact same criteria for moral objections made by conservatives and feminists alike, who hold that:

it involves excessive risks, the prostitute has little autonomy, it violates the prostitute’s bodily integrity, prostitution has a destructive effect on non-commercial intimate relationships, prostitution violates a person’s inalienable right to her sexuality, it contributes to a male-dominated social order, and it relies on the economic coercion of workers. (Shrage, 2004)

For example, the factory worker faces health risks, the domestic servant is socially coded by class and gender, the nightclub singer provides a form of pleasure in public, and the colonoscopy artist experiences ‘the consensual invasion of one’s bodily space’ (Nussbaum, 1999a, p. 285). Writing as a professor of philosophy, Nussbaum (1999a) also highlights how their job could be compared to sex work given that both ‘provide bodily services in areas that are generally thought to be especially intimate and definitive of selfhood’, noting that being paid to produce art or philosophy was also once frowned upon; something ‘degraded by the receipt of a wage’ and thus only possible (free of shame) for aristocrats with more wealth and leisure time (p. 283). Each of the examples listed requires skilled use of the body and interactions with other people in return for payment, undermining the claim that sex work is *not* a job like any other. The only significant differences Nussbaum identified between each occupation were the available economic options and associated social stigma, concluding that perhaps ‘we need, on balance, more studies of women’s credit unions and fewer studies of prostitution’ (p. 298). In Part III, exploring the theme of sexuality, I will complicate this liberal, rights-based approach to challenging sex work criminalisation and stigma by suggesting that a focus on the *sex* aspects, alongside the *work* aspects, of sex work is needed.

In Part II, exploring the theme of gender, I further highlight the role of feminist analyses of sexual exploitation, economics, and the cultural construction of hegemonic ideals.

PART II: Gender

3.3.1 The Construction of Gender

Having highlighted the importance of feminism for theorising work (including sex work), I turn next to contributions made by feminist theory for making sense of gender more broadly. Among the most influential figures here is the existential philosopher Beauvoir (1949). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir articulated a theory of hierarchical gender inequality which related to class inequalities (as discussed in Part I):

Economically, men and women almost form two castes; all things being equal, the former have better jobs, higher wages and greater chances to succeed than their new female competitors; they occupy many more places in industry, in politics, and so on, and they hold the most important positions (p. 10).

Unlike ethnic or sexual minorities, Beauvoir highlighted that women were numerous enough to be considered closer to an oppressed class. On the topic of sex work, Beauvoir (2011) wrote, ‘Whether a legal status puts her under police surveillance or she works clandestinely, she is in any case treated as pariah’, adding that:

From the economic point of view, her situation is symmetrical to the married woman’s... The main difference between them is that the legitimate woman, oppressed as a married woman, is respected as a human person; this respect begins seriously to bring a halt to oppression (p. 613).

The comparison between sex work and marriage as similar forms of ‘sexual contract’—the main distinction being the social stigma attached to the latter—has been highlighted by other feminist theorists (Pateman, 1988; Shrage, 2004). Following Nussbaum’s (1999a) argument that sex work is one of few economic options available to working-class women, we can see how this contributes to commercial sex being perceived overwhelmingly as ‘women’s work’, and thus a form of ‘dirty work’ (Mavin and Grandy, 2013).

This point is further illustrated by the limited list of gendered, often pejorative, terms available to describe sex workers such as ‘call girl’, ‘hooker’, ‘prostitute’, and ‘whore’, with fewer terms available to describe men, such as ‘hustler’ or ‘rent boy’—the latter being illustrative of the cultural association between young men or boys and femininity—unless using the prefixes ‘male’ or ‘man’ (e.g. ‘male prostitute’, ‘man whore’). These limitations of language translate into limitations of thought, framing the discourse around sex work, and influencing regulatory policies. As Minichiello, Scott and Cox (2018) note:

While male sex work appears to be as ubiquitous as female sex work, both culturally and historically, it was often defined as a “homosexuality” prior to the 1950s as distinct from prostitution and regulated accordingly. There are, for example, jurisdictions that define sex work as a uniquely female activity (p. 730).

This cultural association between sex work and women’s work has made sexism, homophobia, and whorephobia interwoven forms of stigma (see Part III). Feminist theory has also focused attention on dismantling the (conscious or subconscious) distinctions between *types* of women, e.g. the ‘good girl’/‘bad whore’ dichotomy—highlighting how all women are hurt by such associations (O’Neill, 2001; Sanders, 2005; Walkowitz, 1982).

Distinguishing ‘sex’ from ‘gender’ (although without using that terminology), Beauvoir wrote, ‘not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity’ (p. 3). On these terms, gender refers to cultural norms which define ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, while sex refers to biological differences (chromosomes, genitalia, hormones, etc.) used to categorise humans as either ‘male’ or ‘female’. However, such a distinction between sex (as biological) and gender (as cultural) is misleading, given that the former is also culturally coded. For example, challenging the legal registration of births along such a sex binary, Fausto-Sterling’s (2000) detailed analysis of the medical literature estimated that up to 1.7% of people are born intersex (p. 53). Often, doctors intervene to ‘correct’ such deviations from the sex binary, on the basis of *cultural* rather than *medical* grounds, where being ‘normal’ is assumed to have psychological benefits—a clear example of biopower, which ‘has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize... it effects distributions around the norm’ (Foucault, 1976, p. 144). For example, Donahoe et al. (1991) argued that if a male infant’s phallus was smaller than 2.0 centimetres this was cause for concern, while a phallus smaller than 1.5 centimetres required female gender assignment. The most important factor for such doctors was ‘how the

penis functions in social interactions—whether it “looks right” to other boys, whether it can “perform satisfactorily” in intercourse’—of the heterosexual kind (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 58). This is not to mention how other arbitrary biological characteristics are used to support the sex binary, including XX/XY chromosomes, ovaries/testis, oestrogen/androgen—all of which have been demonstrated to provide an inadequate account of natural variations of sex characteristics (Fine, 2017). The constellation of differences which occur in nature show that ‘sex is a vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints’ of modern systems of categorisation, and ‘if the state and the legal system have an interest in maintaining a two-party sexual system, they are in defiance of nature’ (Fausto-Sterling, 1993, p. 21).

Expanding on one of Beauvoir’s (1949) most famous lines, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, woman’ (p. 293), Butler (1986) argued that ‘all gender is, by definition, unnatural’ (p. 35), and that one does not simply *become* but is always *becoming* gendered through the embodiment and repetition of cultural norms, highlighting that ‘gender is not originated at some point in time after which it is fixed in form’ (p. 39). As a form of *social constructivism*, informed by anthropological research, Beauvoir is credited as encouraging people to recognise the ‘radical choice’ they have in rejecting seemingly natural institutions such as marriage, monogamy, and motherhood, while recognising the significant socio-economic limitations of such choices. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) took these ideas further through the concept of *gender performativity* to theorise the regulatory and self-perpetuating features of gender. This term is sometimes misunderstood as ‘performance’, suggesting that gender is something theatrically presented to others, along the lines of Goffman’s ‘front stage’ (see Brickell, 2005). However, performativity captures not just how gender is *communicated*, but also how gender is *created* through a constant process of repetition. As Butler (1990) described this process:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (p. 185, original emphasis)

As such, performativity describes the ways in which gender is constructed to make it appear *as if* a fixed binary. Yet, rather than being natural or immutable, gender is achieved through ‘a purposive and appropriative set of acts, the acquisition of a skill’ (p. 36). Those who can’t,

don't, or won't acquire the appropriate skill set (including gender nonconforming and queer people) tend to be stigmatised for their deviance from gender norms, punished by physical, psychological, or symbolic forms of violence. As Masiero (2017) has summarised:

This is because, according to Butler, each gender is a representation, it is not an essence, but rather a series of rites that, when repeated, build up an identity. Societies construct norms governing and materialising sex and these norms need to be repeated and reiterated to be realised as effective, because bodies do not fully conform with norms. And societies constantly and only repeat gender norms from a heterosexual point of view. (p. 125)

Or as Brown (1997) summarised: 'There is not first gender and then the apparatus that regulates it; gender does not exist prior to its regulation... we are literally brought into being as gendered subjects through gender regulation' (p. 87). While Butler's (1990) work has been compared to West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of 'doing gender', performativity conceptualises gender 'as if it is more imaginary than socially constructed' (Risman, 2018, p. 20). In short, this perspective holds that the traditional binary between feminine and masculine is a cultural one, where both ideals are 'imaginary' yet profoundly influential—particularly in limiting the range of acceptable or imaginable options—for people's everyday experiences and identities.

One of the best analogies I have heard to illustrate this theory of gender acquisition is language. In conversation with Butler, Rubin highlighted how 'the enduring quality of certain things sometimes leads people to think that they can't be socially generated', including gender:

The acquisition of our sexual and gender programming is much like the learning of our native cultural system or language. It is much harder to learn new languages, or to be as facile in them as in our first language... As with languages, some people have more gender and erotic flexibility than others. Some can acquire secondary sexual or gender languages, and even fewer will be completely fluent in more than one position. But most people have a home language, and home sexual or gender comfort zones that will not change much. This doesn't mean these things are not social, any more than the difficulties of acquiring other languages means that languages are not social. (Rubin and Butler, 1994, p. 70).

The social construction of gender is also made evident by the relative cultural cues which symbolically code society. As Vance (1984) similarly argued, ‘although human cultures are arbitrary in that behaviour is learned and not intrinsic, anthropologists do not believe that entire cultures can transform themselves overnight, or that individuals socialized in one cultural tradition can acculturate at whim’ (p. 9). The role of culture in constructing masculinity and femininity (as a binary) can be illustrated through examples of arbitrary and historically changing associations between inanimate objects and gender: high heels were worn by aristocratic men centuries before their association with women; the colour pink was worn by boys in the nineteenth century before its association with girls (Chiu et al., 2006)—these changes are of course connected with the development of capitalism and consumerism, where the division of products by gender can increase profit margins. Nothing practical distinguishes a ‘women’s’ pink from a ‘men’s’ blue razor blade, but people tend to buy one over the other (usually at a higher cost) based on the gender scripts we have internalised. I am reminded of this point every time I walk down my local high-street, not only by the products on display, but because a street artist has *gendered* two chimneys by painting pearls around one, and a neck tie around the other (see Figure 3):



Figure 3: Are ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ Sex/Gender Categories Real? (By Max Morris)

If even bricks and mortar can be thought of as ‘male’ or ‘female’ through the application of paint (much like make-up), what is innate or natural about sex/gender categories beyond their cultural context, or—to draw on the concept of discourse again—what can be imagined possible? Another example drawn on by Butler is the complexity of cross-dressing or drag performances, characterised by Newton (1979) as a form of ‘double inversion’, to illustrate the illusory nature of gender:

Drag says, ‘my “outside” appearance is feminine, but my essence “inside” [the body] is masculine.’ At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion: ‘my appearance “outside” [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence “inside” [myself] is feminine’ (p. 103).

As Butler (1990) argues, the gender parody displayed by drag ‘does not assume there is an original which such parodic identities imitate’, rather the ‘parody is *of* the very notion of an original’ (p. 188, original emphasis). This point also follows from Beauvoir’s (2011) writings (on lesbianism), which argued that, ‘Nothing is less *natural* than dressing like a woman; no doubt masculine clothes are also artificial’, even if the latter tend to be more comfortable (p. 446, original emphasis). In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993) further suggested that resistance to gender norms was possible through parody and subversion: ‘It is through performing “bad” or “faulty” versions of gendered identities that resistance and change are made possible’. This perspective stands in contrast to gender essentialist feminism, which I turn to next.

3.3.2 Exclusive and Inclusive Feminism(s)

The terms ‘TERF’ (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) and ‘SWERF’ (Sex Worker Exclusionary Feminist) have become increasingly salient, and widely used on social media platforms to describe ‘feminists’ who oppose the increased visibility, rights, and social acceptance of historically erased women. In this section, I will argue that these labels characterise a common commitment to the *biological determinism* or *gender essentialism* which postmodern gender scholarship seeks to challenge (Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Rubin and Butler, 1994). For example, Rubin (1975) critiqued such forms of gender essentialism prior to the peak of the so-called ‘sex wars’ during the 1980s:

Such a vision maintains gender and the division of the sexes. It is a vision which simply inverts the arguments of those who base their case for inevitable male

dominance on ineradicable and *significant* biological differences between the sexes.

But we are not only oppressed *as* women; we are oppressed by having to *be* women—or men as the case may be (p. 61, original emphasis).

It is important to note that feminist perspectives have proliferated significantly since this period, making it impossible to talk about ‘feminism’ as a singular political and philosophical movement (O’Neill, 2001). Alongside the postmodern and post-Marxist feminisms discussed above, there are black, carceral, ecological, liberal, neoliberal, queer, radical, separatist, sex-negative, sex-positive, trans, and whore feminisms (to name a few), not to mention broader classifications of first, second, third, and now fourth wave feminisms, and post-feminism. While each strand of feminist thought shares a commitment to opposing gender inequality at the cultural, personal/political, and economic levels, gaps have emerged over the best strategies to dismantle patriarchy. Here, I will argue that the gender essentialism of TERFs and SWERFs is comparable with the economic determinism of classical Marxism, and thus limited in its ability to deconstruct the ideology of gender inequality or sexual exploitation.

Contrasting with Butler’s (1990) critique of the regulatory power of gender performativity, exclusionary feminisms tend to focus on limiting the choices available to women in how to use their bodies. For example, alongside conservative religious activists, TERFs have mounted significant campaigns to prevent trans women from accessing ‘women’s spaces’ such as changing rooms, public toilets, or support groups. The justification for this exclusion tends to be that being a ‘woman’ is *not* something socially constructed, but biologically determined from birth, where sex (chromosomes, genitalia, hormones, etc.) is synonymous with gender (c.f. Beauvoir, 1949; Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Furthermore, by allowing ‘women’s spaces’ to be accessed by people whose gender identity is deemed ‘not real’, it is argued that ‘real’ women’s safety will be threatened. In a different, but similarly gender essentialist, way SWERFs argue that commercial sex cannot be chosen because *all* sex work is viewed as a form of ‘violence against women’, and have mounted significant campaigns to criminalise the clients of sex workers (Weitzer, 2009). Such campaigns have ‘united sections of the feminist movement with moral conservative forces’ to oppose the sexual objectification of women, something which sex work is thought to promote (McNair, 2013, p. 4). These movements follow the tradition of radical feminists who gained popularity in the 1970s, such as Dworkin and MacKinnon. Illustrating the gender essentialism of both groups (TERFs and SWERFs), the status of both trans men and men who sell sex is almost entirely sidestepped. As Pateman (1988) argued, the ‘sale of men’s bodies

for homosexual use does not have the same social meaning' as the sale of women's bodies for heterosexual use and is thus less worthy of condemnation (p. 199). However, this gender essentialism erases the experiences of women who consume sex (Aggleton and Parker, 2015; Neville, 2018), and a growing body of research (including this study) which has found male sex work to be more complex and prevalent than previously thought (Logan, 2010; Minichiello and Scott, 2014).

To respond to these forms of exclusionary feminism, I turn to the contributions of black feminist theory, which emerged in response to the erasure and exoticisation of ethnic minority perspectives within 'mainstream' white liberal feminism. As Carby (2007) puts it, these perspectives offer 'ways in which the "triple" oppression of gender, race, and class can be understood, in their specificity and also as they determine the lives of black women' (p. 111). For example, Crenshaw's (1989) concept of *intersectionality* was developed in response to the tendency to treat gender discrimination as 'a white women's issue', and race discrimination as 'a black men's issue', neglecting how these forms of oppression *intersect* for black women. This critique is also related to what Bernstein (2007) has termed 'carceral feminism', highlighting how achieving gender equality through 'law and order' approaches is more likely to exclude marginalised (ethnic and sexual) minorities. In relation to sex work, Grant (2014) notes how those targeted by the criminal justice system tend to be disproportionately 'trans women, women of colour, and queer and gender nonconforming youth', adding that this form of feminism is 'about profiling and policing people whose sexuality and gender are considered suspect' (p. 9); drawing on Foucault, Grant uses the term 'the carceral eye' to characterise the surveillance practices and sexualised gaze of law enforcement in this respect. The use of intersectionality has expanded considerably over recent years, to include other characteristics including class, disability, and sexuality. For example, Logan (2017) notes that a growing body of research 'looks at the racial variation in social value among gay men... and how masculinity and its representations are influenced by other social stereotypes', which I turn to next (p. 127).

3.3.3 Theorising Masculinities

Another limitation to the term gender continues to be its association with 'women's studies', where men's gender is treated as 'neutral' and women's gender becomes cast as 'other' (Beauvoir, 1949; Brown, 1997). The study of 'men and masculinities' emerged partly in

response to this omission, to explore how men's gender (privilege and power) was central to the maintenance of *patriarchy*—men's economic, political, and social dominance over women and other marginalised groups (Pascoe and Bridges, 2016). The most influential contribution from this academic field is Connell's (1987) theory of *hegemonic masculinity*, which applied Gramsci's concept of hegemony to the hierarchical stratification of genders. This included both inter-gender (men's interactions with women) and intra-gender (men's interactions with other men) dynamics of male domination (Demetriou, 2001). As Connell (1987) summarised, hegemonic masculinity is 'always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works' (p. 183). By focusing on inequalities *between* men, Connell's theory was useful for highlighting how masculinity is not a fixed, singular, or unified (essentialist) set of characteristics, but that multiple masculinities co-exist, often in competition or collaboration, in a symbolic struggle for social status. Although hegemonic masculinity tends to be characterised as 'competitive, individualistic, brawny, violent, and tied to heterosexuality', the term refers to any form of masculinity which is culturally and socially valorised (above all others) in a given period and place (Walby, 2012, p. 70). Importantly, the hegemonic archetype need not be easily attainable, or even real, with film and sports stars often standing in as representative of what the *ideal* masculinity should look like or be (Connell, 1992).

Alongside hegemonic masculinity, Connell characterised 'complicit masculinities'—men who support hegemonic ideals even while being excluded from them (the majority)—alongside 'marginalised masculinities' (e.g. black men), and 'subordinate masculinities' (e.g. gay men). As Demetriou (2001) has clarified, 'while subordination refers to relations internal to the gender order, the concept of marginalization describes... the interplay of gender with other structures, such as class and ethnicity' (p. 342). Given that the participants of this study identified as gay, bisexual, and queer men (of diverse class and ethnic backgrounds), I will focus on the relevance of Connell's theory for understanding the masculinities of sexual minorities, before turning to the role of *homophobia* and *heterosexism* in regulating gender.

The regulation of sexualities is central to the maintenance of masculine hegemony (see Part III). As Connell (1987) argued in *Gender and Power*:

The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage; and a key form of

subordinated masculinity is homosexual. This subordination involves both direct interactions and a kind of ideological warfare... police and legal harassment, street violence, economic discrimination. These transactions are tied together by the contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men that is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity. The AIDS scare has been marked less by sympathy for gays as its main victims than by hostility to them as the bearers of a new threat. The key point of media concern is whether the “gay plague” will spread to “innocent”, i.e., straight, victims (p. 186).

While the early gay liberation movements characterised ‘gayness’ as dissenting from traditional gender roles, this ‘became less and less credible with the spread of “gay machismo” and the “clone” style in the homosexual subcultures of the late 1970s and early 1980s’ (Connell, 1987, p. 37). This was a theme Connell (1992) explored further in *A Very Straight Gay*, which drew on the experiences of gay men to identify ‘contradictions’ in their narratives of and about masculinity, such as those who politically ‘reject hypermasculinity, but also dislike queens, i.e., effeminate gays’, or whose erotic desires include aspects of both conventional masculinity and femininity:

The choice of a man as sexual object is not just the choice of a-body-with-penis; it is the choice of embodied-masculinity. The cultural meanings of masculinity are (generally) part of the package. In this sense, most gays are “very straight.” Being a “straight gay” is not just a matter of middle-class respectability—similar positions are taken by working-class men outside the gay community (p. 746).

Following Connell, other researchers have documented how sexual minority men embrace aspects of hegemonic masculinity, both in their own gender performativity, and in what they desire in others (Donaldson, 1993). One such example comes from the growing social commentary about social networking sites and apps (such as Grindr), where sexual minority men’s profiles often include statements such as ‘no blacks’, ‘no fats’, ‘no fems’, sometimes justified as ‘just a preference’—as if sexual desire can exist independently of political and social inequalities (see 5.7), an essentialist assumption about the biology of desire which I will challenge in Part III.

On the topic of male sex work, several recent studies have drawn on hegemonic masculinity to explain their findings (Kumar, Scott and Minichiello, 2017; Logan, 2017). For example, Kumar, Scott and Minichiello (2017) found that online male sex workers

emphasised traditionally masculine occupational features of their labour (e.g. ‘hard work’ and ‘technical skill’), in contrast with female sex workers who often frame their work in terms of emotional labour (Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Deshotels and Forsyth, 2006). However, it is possible that the valorisation of hegemonic masculinity may be more, or as much as, about sexual desire than power among gay men (Donaldson, 1993). As such, research with professional male sex workers may have little or no correlation with this study of incidental male sex work (see 8.6). Relatedly, in an analysis of 1,932 online profiles of male escorts, Logan (2017) found that those with more ‘hegemonically masculine traits’, such as ‘muscularity’ or being a ‘top’, could charge a higher premium for their services than men with ‘average’ or ‘excessive’ weight, those who were ‘thin’, or a ‘bottom’, traits associated with femininity (p. 134). Logan’s findings also intersected with race, where black men who conformed ‘to stereotypes of hypermasculinity and sexual dominance are highly sought after, and those who do not conform are severely penalized’ (p. 138).

Despite the significance of these findings, Walby (2012) has cautioned that Logan’s methodology may be limited, neglecting other characteristics such as ‘penis size’ or being ‘versatile’ (see 6.4 for further discussion of sexual roles such as ‘top’, ‘bottom’, and ‘versatile’), drawing on the example of ‘power bottoms’ to challenge the assumption that bottoming is always feminine, and topping always masculine, ‘a mistaken active-versus-passive dichotomy that makes little sense’ (p. 35). Alongside noting that hegemonic masculinity cannot be reduced to either ‘a single trait’ or ‘representations’, Walby (2012) has also suggested that Logan’s approach ‘constitutes an empirical problem because escorts often manipulate these listings—posting enhanced and edited pictures—to secure a competitive market advantage’ (p. 35). Furthermore, the higher premium associated with one’s sexual role could be explained by other contextual factors, such as the number of users ‘advertising’ themselves as tops, bottoms, or versatile in a specific location—something which varies between cities, regions, and states—resulting in a perceived ‘oversupply’ or ‘undersupply’ of certain groups. I use scare-quotes to highlight how the digital spaces in which male sex workers advertise is also influenced by the wider non-commercial sexual ‘marketplace’. In Part III, I further explore the blurred boundaries between casual and commercial sex on digital platforms designed for sexual minority men, alongside theories of sexuality which explore the role of sex panics, stigma, stereotypes, and surveillance (see 7.6 and 7.7).

3.3.4 Homophobia and Heteronormativity

The term *homophobia* describes an irrational disgust, fear, or hatred towards people who are sexually or romantically attracted to the same gender, are gender nonconforming, or identify as such (Pharr, 1997). Coined by a clinical psychologist in the late 1960s (Weinberg, 1972), analysis of homophobia has been influential for ‘locating the “problem” of homosexuality not in homosexual people, but in heterosexuals who were intolerant of gay men and lesbians’ (Herek, 2004, p. 8). More recently, terms including ‘biphobia’, ‘transphobia’, and ‘queerphobia’ have been added to the lexicon, describing specific forms of prejudice and mistreatment experienced by other groups under the ‘LGBTQ’ umbrella. Homophobia has been shown to have damaging consequences for gender and sexual minorities in different research settings (e.g. Ghaill, 1994; Rivers, 2011; Russell and Joyner, 2001), affecting a diverse range of outcomes including school attendance, career progression, and psychological wellbeing (Garnets, Herek and Levy, 1990). Research has also highlighted the damaging consequences of homophobia for heterosexual people in some contexts, where the compulsion to appear or be normative can regulate behaviours (Worthen, 2014). Relatedly, studies show that gender nonconformity is closely associated with experiences of bullying among sexual minority young people (Thompson, Sinclair, Wilchins & Russell, 2013), leading some researchers to suggest that adherence to gender norms may be a more salient factor for assessing psychological wellbeing than belonging to a sexual minority identity group, per se (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Rieger and Savin-Williams, 2012). As suggested above by Connell (1987), homophobia has been central to understandings of gender hierarchy, and Plummer (1999) argued it was a central factor in the production of heterosexual masculinities. Returning to the concept of performativity is useful here for highlighting how one’s ‘failure’ to embody the ‘correct’ gender behaviours can become coded as ‘gay’, resulting in forms of physical and symbolic violence (Butler, 1990).

Alongside forms of overt homophobia (Plummer, 1999; Rivers, 2011), there are subtler ways in which heterosexuality can be privileged, without explicit condemnation of same-sex desire. While masculinities theorists have tended to emphasise one over the other, the empirical research suggests that to understand the regulation of genders—and thus what gender is, itself (Butler, 1990)—it is necessary to highlight the role of both misogyny *and* homophobia. Both forms of irrational prejudice (towards women and sexual minorities) are sides of the same coin, reinforcing each other through the privileging of (hegemonic) masculinity and heterosexuality. The concept of *heterosexism* is another way to characterise

this dual process, defined as the implicit privileging of heterosexuality and gender binarism (Dean, 2014; Ferfolja, 2007). For example, Epstein and Johnson (1994) found that diverse sexual identities were silenced in school settings through what they called a ‘heterosexual presumption’, where people were assumed to be heterosexual. Given the gendered aspects of research around sex work (see above), heterosexual presumption also pervades understandings of commercial sex, often framed ubiquitously in terms of male clients and female workers, neglecting women who pay for sex, and men who sell it. Another useful concept here is *heteronormativity*, which describes the cultural processes by which deviations from heterosexuality become framed as abnormal. Drawing on Foucault’s understanding of normativity as a defining characteristic of modern forms of power, this concept may be more useful for making sense of the regulatory power of sexual norms in the British context, where homophobic attitudes have declined or become less visible (Clements and Field, 2014; Morris, 2018; Weeks, 2007). Part III turns to this topic by exploring theories of sexuality and social change.

PART III: Sexuality

3.4.1 From Gay Studies to Queer Theory

Much as ‘women’s studies’ began to appear in universities during the late 1960s and early 1970s, ‘gay and lesbian studies’ expanded during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, research produced and disseminated by such academic courses and conferences was often defined by its radicalism, where gay and lesbian liberation movements pushed for social change and created the groundwork for ‘gay and lesbian studies’ (Minton, 1997). As described in Chapter Two, this period was also marked by growing tensions within feminist theory over understandings of sexuality, particularly concerning how to balance the ‘danger’ of sex as a form of coercion, manipulation, or violence (against women), and the ‘pleasure’ of sex as a form of exploration, fulfilment, and perhaps even liberation—free from the slut-shaming, victim-blaming, and whorephobia of past patriarchal cultures (DuBois and Gordon, 1984). Social constructivism provided a useful theoretical framework for addressing these issues, as Vance (1984) argued: ‘feminist work on sexuality starts from the premise that sex is a social construction, articulated at many points with the economic, social, and political structures of the material world’ (p. 7). Gay and

lesbian studies was similarly situated within a constructivist framework, concerned with challenging the inequalities and injustices caused by ideologies which held homosexuality as bad/deviant/sinful, and thus heterosexuality as good/natural/normal. The main strategies to challenge such injustice proposed within this research paradigm were centred around identity politics, where greater visibility (through ‘coming out’) and political mobilisation (through ‘pride parades’) would contribute to changing social attitudes, law and policy. The emergence of *queer theory* began to ask critical questions about such strategies, including their neglect of those excluded by such identitarian, rights-based campaigning, such as those unable or unwilling to come out as lesbian or gay, those whose sexuality or gender defied the available categories, and those whose class, race, or other ‘undesirable’ characteristics disqualified them from public perceptions of ‘good’ role models (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). At an academic level, Brown (1997) argued that ‘any field organized by social identity rather than by genre of inquiry’, including both women’s studies and gay and lesbian studies, ‘is especially vulnerable to losing its *raison d’être* when the coherence or boundedness of its object of study is challenged’ (p. 86). As I will suggest towards the end of Part III, a similar conclusion can also be drawn about the boundedness and coherence of ‘sex work studies’, as exemplified by the existence of incidental sex work.

Emerging from critical theories of class, gender, and race (see Parts I and II), a core aspect of queer theory is its critique of traditional research models which rely on, and thus reinforce, socially constructed binaries: black/white, male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal, etc. (Sedgwick, 1990). Valocchi (2005) adds that a focus on the instability and incoherence of constructed gender and sexual identities, postmodern definitions of power, and intersectionality, are defining aspects of the ‘queer theory paradigm’ (p. 757). Providing a helpful summary of queer theory as ‘covering a diverse range of ideas and knowledges, as well as political projects... all united by a critical attitude’, Masiero (2017) also highlights three overlapping ways in which the term ‘queer’ can be used: as a concept, as a noun, or as a verb. As noted above, conceptually queer refers to postmodern forms of analysis which destabilise the notion of fixed gender and sexual categories, ‘especially to bring to light the various forms of normative regulation that produce injustices for those not seen to be complying with dominant sexual norms’ (p. 131). As a noun, queer can be used as an umbrella term to characterise all gender and sexual minorities, while emphasising this group’s differences from cisgender and heterosexual norms, making it something of ‘a post-identity identity’ (p. 127). As a verb, the term is used *to queer*, or as

something which *queers*, normative ways of thinking (broadly conceived) though ‘a constant interrogative stance towards what is taken for granted as being normal’ (p. 132). My focus in Part III will be the role of queer as a concept which destabilises essentialist categories, while recognising that this intellectual project cannot be separated from the politics of queer. As Whittle (2005) has argued:

Queer theory is about the deconstruction and the refusal of labels of personal sexual activity, and it is also concerned with the removal of pathologies of sexuality and gendered behaviour. It concerns “gender fuck”, which is a full-frontal theoretical and practical attack on the dimorphism of gender- and sex-roles (p. 117).

While queer theory distances itself from gay and lesbian studies, given the latter’s adoption of fixed identity labels (as both an intellectual and political strategy), both can be characterised by their deconstructive approach towards the conservative tendencies of sexual essentialism (Epstein, 1994; Rubin, 1984).

The empirical focus of early queer scholarship, particularly within literary and historical research, was the shifting social meanings of sexual identity labels across the modern period. This body of research highlighted how sexual behaviours, customs, identities, laws, and social groupings were culturally contingent, rather than biologically fixed. For example, closely mirroring Foucault’s perspective, Weeks (1985) summarised his works on sexuality by writing:

My starting point was the rejection of any approach which assumed the existence, across cultures and across time, of a fixed homosexual person. On the contrary, I argued then, as I argue now, that the idea that there is such a person as *a* “homosexual” (or indeed *a* “heterosexual”) is a relatively recent phenomenon, a product of a history of “definition and self-definition” that needs to be described and understood (p. 6, original emphasis).

As I described in Chapter Two, the construction of ‘the prostitute’ as a fixed identity occurred alongside the construction of ‘the homosexual’, as described by Weeks, in the latter half of the nineteenth century; this was informed by psychoanalysis and sexology in the former half of the twentieth century, where the legal and social distinction between ‘deviant’ and ‘normal’ sex became reified (Houlbrook, 2005; Kaye, 2014; Walby, 2012). Relatedly, Plummer (1995) has argued that before the 1960s it was not possible to describe ‘gay’ identities and ways of being—highlighting the significance of discourse for limiting what can

and cannot be imagined—through coming out narratives, for example (Plummer, 1995; Weeks, 1977). Walby (2012) adds that the ‘kinds of stories it is possible for us to tell are constrained by historical and social processes; one cannot tell a “gay liberation” story before the 1960s’ (p. 173). However, as Connell (1992) argued, the phrase ‘coming out’ often means ‘coming in to an existing gay milieu. Gay theoreticians, especially those influenced by Foucault, have debated whether the collective identity sustained in this milieu is a means of "regulation" and ultimately a means of oppression’ (p. 744). For example, Adler (2018) has suggested that those who support gay liberation often do so ‘with depictions of virtuous rights bearers who are deserving of equality: patriotic, bourgeois, and familial’—archetypes which ‘depend on degraded others hidden in the subtext of discourse’ (p. 89). As such, one of the main questions posed by queer theory is: liberation for whom? Who may be excluded by the ways in which terms such as (gay) ‘identity’, ‘liberation’, and ‘rights’, are constructed?

The role of capitalism, consumerism, and neoliberalism as dominant economic ideologies is also central to the social construction of sexual minority identities throughout the modern period. For example, D’Emilio (1998) has argued that the geographical and technological changes brought about by nineteenth century capitalism made this possible:

The interlocking processes of urbanization and industrialization created a social context in which an autonomous personal life could develop. Affection, intimate relationships, and sexuality moved increasingly into the realm of individual choice, seemingly disconnected from how one organized the production of goods necessary for survival. In this setting, men and women who felt a strong erotic attraction to their own sex could begin to fashion from their feeling a personal identity and a way of life. (p. 11)

Vance (1984) has also noted that the ‘classification of sexual types awaited the late nineteenth century, when capitalism and urban development made it possible for individuals to exist beyond the sphere of the extended family as a productive and reproductive unit’ (p. 8). This directly relates to feminist perspectives on the emergence of ‘gendered spheres’ following the division of labour under capitalist industrialisation, where men and women performed more unequal and separate socio-economic roles than in preceding agrarian societies (Cancian, 1987). In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990) further argued that, just as everyone was assigned either male or female, from this period everyone ‘was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or a hetero-sexuality, a binarized

identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence' (p. 2). Again, the 'sexual revolutions' of the 1960s marked a period in which both sexual and gender expectations/norms/roles underwent significant change in relation to capitalism: 'Sex was freer than ever, but everywhere it was commoditised and commercialised as never before' (Weeks, 1985, p. 222).

In this context, the gay identity has become ever more closely associated with a white, well-groomed, urban, middle-class, able-bodied stereotype through visual representations including, increasingly, social media platforms (Mowlabocus, 2010). The proliferation and popularity of such forms of digital media, from Instagram and YouTube to Gaydar and Grindr, sexual minority men's visual representation has expanded, but in ways which privilege particular expressions of gender and lifestyle (Bonner-Thompson, 2017). The distinction between 'good gays' and 'bad queers', as described by Stychin (1998, p. 200), has thus extended far beyond legal and medical frameworks, to include cultural representations tied with middle-class consumerism. To achieve the social status of the former requires an ability to purchase (and display oneself consuming) expensive goods and services; to avoid the latter label requires the adoption of social norms which some feminists have sought to overcome for the better part of a century: marriage, monogamy, and masculinity (Beauvoir, 1949). Critical of 'a white, male, middle-class consumerist movement', Seidman (2015) has suggested that queer theory challenges the modernist assumption of capitalist progress, arguing that 'even if gays were fully accepted, there would still be a sexual culture that classifies our sexual desires, acts, and relationships as either normal and good or abnormal and bad' (p. 72). Next, I turn to Rubin's (1984) theory of the 'charmed circle' and 'outer limits' of sexuality to further explore the themes of sexual hierarchy and inequality.

3.4.2 The Charmed Circle and Outer Limits

In *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, Rubin (1984) provided one of the most influential (queer) conceptual frameworks for understanding the power of sexual hierarchy. Rubin (1984) described how multiple sexual behaviours were relegated to the 'outer limits' of social acceptability, including commercial, homosexual, and promiscuous sex, deemed as morally reprehensible deviations from 'normal, natural, healthy' sexuality (p. 281). Conversely, heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive sex was afforded a privileged status within the 'charmed circle' of this sexual stratification. Rubin's theory was

also significant for demonstrating that a theory of sexual inequality could be developed away from exclusionary forms of feminism (Rubin and Butler, 1994). Drawing on the ideas of social constructivists including Walkowitz (1982) on the modern history of ‘prostitution’ and Weeks (1977) on the modern history of ‘homosexuality’, Rubin was particularly influenced by Foucault, whose writing focused on the ‘big picture’ of how ‘erotic desire encompassed a diverse set of practices, strategies, discourses, institutions, and knowledges that were historically contingent and were played out on a dispersed field of power’ (Epstein, 1994, p. 192). Rubin (1984) joined Foucault in critiquing biological and psychological explanations of sexual difference which tended to reinforce ‘the notion of a natural libido subjected to inhumane repression’ (p. 277). This view was also endorsed by liberal rights-based approaches to identity politics (Adler, 2018), a discourse of repression which characterised the dominant view of sex as ‘eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical’, obscuring the specific social, political, historical contexts in which sexualities were stratified (Rubin, 1984, p. 275). Alongside challenging this form of ‘sexual essentialism’, Rubin identified: (1) ‘sex negativity’, (2) ‘the fallacy of misplaced scale’, (3) ‘the hierarchical valuation of sex acts’, (4) ‘the domino theory of sexual peril’, and (5) ‘the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation’ as ideological trends which exacerbated the oppression experienced by most sexual minorities for their ‘failure’ to conform to norms.

Rubin identified (1) as the most significant of these ideological traditions, rooted in the history of (Western) religious dogma, though not always framed in theological language given the rise of secularism. As Foucault (1977) expanded, in ‘Christian societies, sex has been the central object of examination, surveillance, avowal and transformation into discourse’ (p. 152). Through such discourse sex was viewed as ‘dangerous’, ‘destructive’, and ‘inherently sinful’ to the extent that most erotic behaviour was ‘considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established’ (e.g. marriage, reproduction, love). This related to (2), where ‘law has incorporated the religious attitude that heretical sex is an especially heinous sin that deserves the harshest punishments’, further reflected by exaggerated regulatory fear about sexual taste, unlike disagreements over diet or fashion. Accordingly (3), Rubin argued that sexuality exists within a system of stratification:

According to this system, sexuality that is “good”, “normal”, and “natural” should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home. It

should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and female. Any sex that violates these rules is “bad”, “abnormal”, or “unnatural”. Bad sex may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial. It may be masturbatory or take place at orgies, may be casual, may cross-generational lines, and may take place in “public”, or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles. (Rubin, 1984, pp. 280-1)

To visually illustrate this system, Rubin introduced a diagram of the ‘charmed circle’ and ‘outer limits’ of sexual values (see Figure 4):

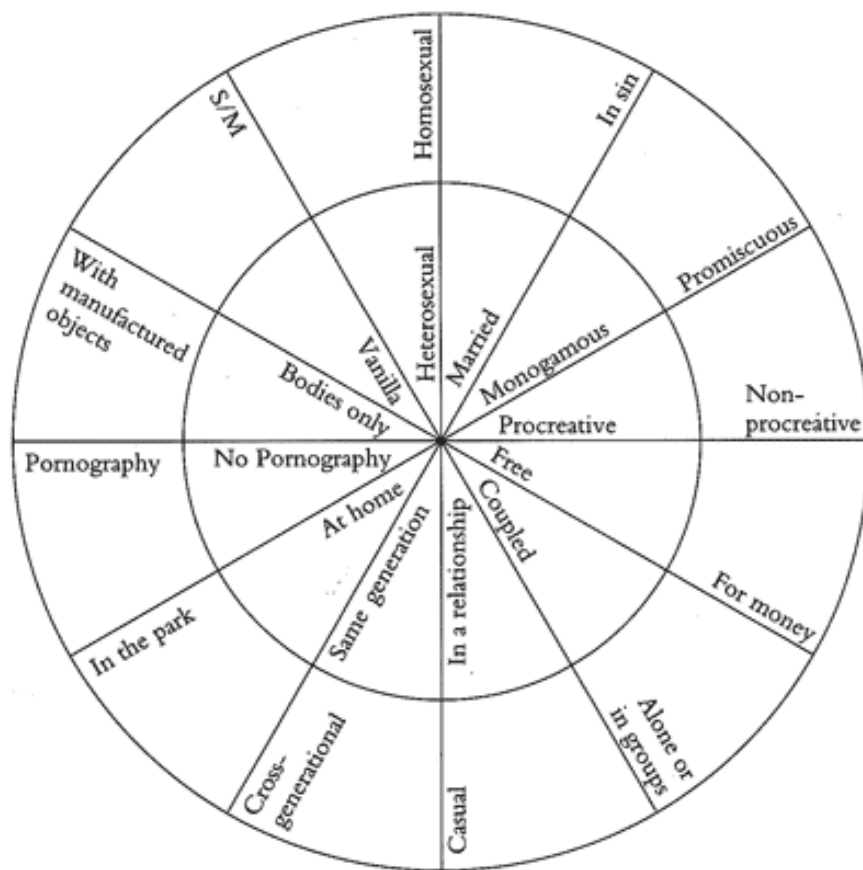


Figure 4: Rubin's 'Charmed Circle' and 'Outer Limits' of Sexual Values

Rubin’s model fits within queer theory by acknowledging, and advocating for fair treatment of, sexual behaviours and identities which exist outside of an imagined and idealised ‘centre’ (Masiero, 2017). Adopting a constructivist perspective, Rubin’s theory was

situated within a specific period of intensifying public fear about sexuality; in the context of an emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic and following a series of legal crackdowns on pornography endorsed by radical feminists and religious conservatives alike (McNair, 2013). Rubin compared this historical moment to England in the 1880s (see 2.2), and America in the 1950s when national security concerns about communism contributed to the creation of laws against ‘sex offenders’—directed mainly towards the ‘lavender menace’ of homosexuality (Shepard, 2009). Such periods of intensified political and social tension contributed to (4), which described ‘the need to draw and maintain an imaginary line between good and bad sex’, and the misplaced ‘fear that if anything is permitted to cross... the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across’ (p. 282). Only those behaviours within the charmed circle are permitted any degree of moral complexity. On the one hand, heterosexuality could be viewed as ‘sublime or disgusting, free or forced, healing or destructive, romantic or mercenary’; on the other hand, ‘homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transsexuality, and cross-generational encounters are still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence’ (p. 283). Rubin argued that this perspective was illogical because differences in sexual taste or behaviour—if done in a consenting and pleasurable way (Langdrige and Barker, 2007)—were morally indistinguishable from other cultural differences, such as cuisine, etiquette, or forms of labour; topics which did not incite such intense social anxieties or state interventions. According to (5), what was needed was a shift in perspective away from rigid moral binaries of sex, to view such differences as benign. Commentary and research on sexualities, Rubin (1984) argued, would benefit from a more relativist ‘anthropological understanding’ of cultural variation (p. 284).

3.4.3 Sex Stigmas and Stereotypes

Central to Rubin’s theory is the role played by sexual stigmas for maintaining the boundaries between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sex. The best-known definition of *stigma* comes from Goffman (1963), who defined it as ‘an attribute that is deeply discrediting’ to a group or individual—by comparison with ‘normals’—adding that there is ‘a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype’ (pp. 13-4). Goffman listed a range of attributes which were stigmatised, including ‘addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts’, etc. (an example of the kinds of lists which Connell critiqued in deviancy theory). Stigma may relate to physical differences (e.g. disability) or cultural associations (e.g. gender

nonconformity), which are reinforced through the use of negative stereotypes. Stigmas and stereotypes are further reproduced through the construction of cultural *myths* about the ‘dangerousness’, ‘uncleanliness’, or ‘undesirability’ associated with a certain ‘type’ of person (Corbin, 1990). Each of these terms (stigma/stereotype/myth) has been widely adopted by researchers to understand the experiences of sex workers (Abel and Fitzgerald, 2010; Link and Phelan, 2001; Pescosolido and Martin, 2015), including their contribution to multiple forms of (employment, familial, police) discrimination, and how individuals may internalise or manage them (O’Neill, 2001). For example, Sanders (2005) has written about the significance of secrecy as a strategy to avoid sex work stigma:

To understand why secrecy is so common among sex workers, it is important to briefly outline the stigma associated with prostitution. Women who sell sex are subject to derogatory images and myths. Several accounts of the fetishization, marginalization and victimization of women who sell sex contribute to an understanding of the “whore stigma”. Sex workers are assumed to be members of a “high risk” group, associated with HIV/AIDS and drug use, disease and sexual deviancy. (p. 117)

Sanders (2005) added that, alongside experiences of harassment and intimidation (by the media, neighbours, police and other state actors), ‘insidious messages can become internalized and act as a form of *self-stigmatization*’ (p. 118, emphasis added; see 7.6).

In the journal *Sexualities*, the topic of sex work stigma was addressed by Weitzer (2017) in a special issue, who critiqued both Goffman and sex work scholars more broadly for assuming that ‘once an individual or category of people had been stigmatized, it is internalized by them and is basically permanent’, neglecting ‘the larger question of *how* stigma can be reduced or eliminated vis-a-vis an entire category of people’ (p. 718, emphasis added). Adopting ‘the tactics of deviance liberation movements’ including the gay rights movement, Weitzer (2017) argued that sex workers should ‘come out’ by ‘announcing that he or she [*sic*] had full agency when entering sex work; is currently in control of his/her [*sic*] working conditions and interactions with clients; defines the work as a service profession like any other’, and deny that their work has any harmful aspects (p. 720). While Weitzer’s general call for strategies of decriminalisation and destigmatisation were welcomed, responses by other leading sex work researchers highlighted problems with this approach in line with queer theory’s critique of gay identity politics.

Chapkis (2017), Phoenix (2017), and Sanders (2017) all highlighted how any approach to ending sex work stigma cannot neglect intersections of class, gender, and race, nor the role of homophobia and heterosexism in contributing to sex worker stereotypes. More problematically, Weitzer's (2017) strategies appeared to make a distinction between 'reputable' (indoor) and 'disreputable' (outdoor) forms of sex work, contributing to the construction of a binary division between 'good' and 'bad' forms of sex. In part, this distinction was utilised to 'normalise' the former as a form of labour like any other (see Ślezak, 2012; Story and Jankowski, 2015). However, as Sanders (2017) noted, 'processes of normalization evident in some jurisdictions [are] often led by neo-liberal economic policies that favour sex as a market commodity and the demand for sexual services (direct and indirect) as part of the neo-liberal project of the self' (p. 738), while Phoenix (2017) agreed that Weitzer's approach seemed like a 'defence of a neo-liberal economic policy on prostitution' (p. 740), something which 'does not seem to recognize that the political drive to destigmatize sexual commerce without also critiquing neo-liberal, consumer capitalism is, in effect, arguing for an approach in which "market forces" become the ultimate regulator of sex work' (p. 741). Chapkis (2017) further highlighted how 'any categorization of some sex workers as "disreputable"—and other workers, in a patriarchal, racist, capitalist, carceral state, as having "full agency"—reinforces the problem of stigma rather than resolves it', and argued that 'the tired and highly flawed project of "normalization" relies on moving the line separating reputable and disreputable, not erasing it' (p. 744). Just as queer theory challenges the gay liberation movement's focus on respectability politics (Grant, 2014), this approach towards sex worker 'normalisation' (in the context of neoliberal and capitalist exploitation) will not resolve the problem of stigma: 'The effect of such strategies would be, at best, to shift stigma, not to eliminate it' (p. 743). Rather than treating normalisation as the goal, Shrage (1994) drew on Rubin's theory to argue that 'we should develop interpretive accounts of more "respectable sexualities"—such as heterosexuality, middle-class marital sexuality, or male sexuality—as well as more stigmatized ones', adding that if researchers 'focus our accounts exclusively on socially marginal sexualities, then we will contribute to the further marginalization of sexual minorities, as Rubin fears' (p. 81). This point was mirrored by Nussbaum's (1999a) argument that we need 'fewer studies of prostitution' (p. 298; see 3.2.5).

Relating this to queer theory, it is argued that the construction of new norms will always be exclusionary to those who fail to achieve them; just as the 'successes' of the gay liberation movement, which Weitzer understandably draws on so heavily, depended on the

emulation of capitalist and heterosexual norms (e.g. through access to marriage). As Plummer (1995), suggested, the gay liberation movement ‘has set a model for other sexually diverse experiences to follow’ (p. 91). Even before achieving such legal rights, Rubin (1984) noted how ‘long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability’ while promiscuous and gender nonconforming sexual minorities remained relegated to the outer limits (p. 279); it was the adoption of *some* aspects of the charmed circle which afforded these ‘normative’ sexual minorities a degree of legitimacy. During the 1980s, gay men also adopted a more assimilationist gender politics in response to the stigma generated by the HIV/AIDS crisis (Connell, 1992; Halkitis, 1999), even if there was ‘a groundswell in queer political activism’ at this time (Morris, 2018, p. 1185). However, as noted in Chapter Two, from the early 1990s, there has been a consistent and significant decline in homophobic social attitudes (Clements and Field, 2014; Weeks, 2007), to the extent that some sexual minorities are now ‘accepted and celebrated for being gay, sometimes interpreting their sexuality as a form of social privilege’—although this is more common among middle-class than working-class gay students (Morris, 2018, p. 1199; also see Heaphy, 2011). Another aspect of the charmed circle which has changed significantly over this period are attitudes towards casual, promiscuous, and non-marital sex, which have liberalised significantly (Treas, 2002). The emergence of ‘hook-up cultures’ among young people further suggests that the ‘sex negativity’ which characterised Rubin’s model has begun to wane (Bogle, 2008; Wade, 2017). Not based on identity politics, the increased social acceptability of casual sex may offer an alternative approach to challenging sex work stigma, which I turn to next.

3.4.4 The Sex Aspects of Sex Work

A core aspect of Weitzer’s (2017) neoliberal, rights-based, strategy for challenging stigma is to consider sex work ‘a form of labour like any other’. Missing from this analysis of the *work* aspects of sex work is consideration of the *sex* aspects of sex work. Here, issues of class, gender, and race inequality may be even more likely to emerge than a straightforward analysis of employment rights and unionisation allows for (see Chapter Eight). Furthermore, some aspects of sex work cannot be treated as synonymous with other forms of work, as this may elide intersectional inequalities (c.f. Nussbaum, 1999a). For example, attempts to outlaw employment discrimination on the grounds of gender and race would be more difficult under a liberal sexual economy where ‘free choice’ reigns. This omission also exists within sex worker rights advocacy, more generally, where the mantra ‘sex work is work’ has gained

significant import. Unfortunately, this omission has left a space open for exclusionary feminists to argue that sex work is *not* a form of labour like any other, since it (exclusively and inherently, in their view) involves the exploitation of women's bodies. Therefore, to conclude Part III, I will suggest that an alternative approach to challenging sex work stigma, inspired by incidental sex work as an unorganised social and economic activity (c.f. Connell and Hart, 2003), is to consider sex work 'a form of leisure like any other'. In the context of liberalising social attitudes towards sex mentioned above (Attwood and Smith, 2013; Bogle, 2008; Wade, 2017), incidental sex work—perhaps more than any other form of sex work—blurs the boundary between sex as a form of work and play.

This framing of sex work as a form of casual, recreational, leisure activity draws on the concept of *leisure sex* articulated by Attwood and Smith (2013), who suggest that as attitudes towards sexuality have liberalised under twenty-first century capitalism, sex has transitioned from being primarily about love or romance (traditionally within marriage) to a recreational activity, determinedly pursued by diverse groups, including BDSM and LGBTQ communities. Challenging sex negativity, this framing offers an alternative way to understand sex as a pleasurable and unproblematic aspect of people's behaviours and identities (Rubin, 1984). Applied to some forms of sex work, leisure sex can be understood as a useful model for exploring ways in which sex has become 'available for sale and purchase as readily as any other form of commercially packaged leisure activity' (Bernstein, 2007, p. 7). Drawing on this concept, I argue that digital media platforms have expanded the opportunities available to people to experiment with their sexuality (see 7.3), particularly young people already engaging in other forms of identity construction and social experimentation (Arnett, 2004; Attwood and Smith, 2013; Waskul, 2015). This conceptual framework also compliments postmodern (feminist and queer) understandings of gender and sexuality as existing beyond rigid, socially constructed, systems of classification which have become increasingly fluid (see 5.1). Following Rubin (1984), by adopting this approach, it becomes possible to consider commercial sexual encounters in all their complexity (unlike those behaviours in the 'outer limits'), including both pleasures and dangers (Vance, 1984), alongside broader structural inequalities. This supports Tyler's (2014) analysis of the narratives of male sex workers, which suggested that the 'construction of casual sex and commercial sex as being the same type of experience except for the negotiation of a direct payment reinforces the complementarity of Rubin's (1993) charmed circle' (p. 145).

Importantly, this is not an argument against academics or activists who emphasise the work aspects of sex work, it is merely a reminder that this is only one half of a currently popular term for a diverse set of practices involving the exchange of money for sex. Alongside focusing on both the sex *and* work aspects of sex work, researchers have begun to explore the work aspects of sex more broadly, including the different forms of emotional and physical labour involved. In some ways, this expansion of analysis would mirror Hochschild's examination of the role played by emotions in both public and private workplaces. In other words, what distinguishes experiences of sex 'on the job', from experiences of sex with casual or long-term partners 'at home' (see Sanders, 2005). Relatedly, research around stigma has highlighted how sex worker identities can be 'managed', through selective disclosure and other strategies, to avoid discrimination (Koken, 2012). Given that social attitudes towards casual sex have liberalised significantly over recent decades (alongside attitudes towards homosexuality), rather than comparing sex worker rights to gay rights, a complementary strategy may be to challenge the distinction between casual and commercial sex. If sex work is a form of sex, much like any other, what justifies its criminalisation and stigmatisation? Exploring tensions between 'sex' and 'work', as defining categories of human behaviour, alongside the role of homophobia, racism, and sexism in the experiences of young men who sell sex incidentally, are central themes of this thesis (see 8.1 and 8.5).

3.5 Responding to Critiques

One of the most common critiques of postmodernism I have encountered is that its adherents tend to communicate their theories in a highly inaccessible manner. Terms including 'discourse', 'hegemony', and 'performativity' are often described so vaguely that they could be applied to almost anything, making them incomprehensible to a lay audience. As Oakley (2002) has argued, the language of postmodernism is 'dense, imprecise, long-winded, grammatically complex, hugely inaccessible and hence intrinsically undemocratic' (p. 109). Providing a stronger critique of Butler's work, Nussbaum (1999b) argued that this style is 'ponderous and obscure', baffling to non-academic audiences, and thus offers few prospects for political change (p. 2). Responding to this, in this chapter I have attempted to convey postmodern perspectives on class, gender, and sexuality, including definitions of key terminology, in a simple and straightforward manner. Besides a personal preference for clear communication, the main reason I have adopted such a writing style is because I want those

who participated in this study to be able to understand it, and perhaps offer their own critiques of my analysis and representation—of *their* stories (see 4.3 for further discussion of treating participants as peers). Social research is always a collaborative endeavour, including the process of writing, where an overly florid or verbose style may be exclusionary to those unfamiliar with the bourgeoisie norms of academia. By contrast, this thesis is committed to public dissemination, policy change, and the inclusion of research participants. Nonetheless, such critiques are about style rather than substance. Thus, if postmodern gender and sexuality scholarship has something important and original to contribute to debates about sex work, why not translate these dense, introspective, philosophical concepts into a more accessible language? Butler's own response to this critique, in the 1999 preface of *Gender Trouble*, argued that the popularity of performativity was partly due to the number of (especially gender and sexual minority) people who did not struggle with the concept because it was something they lived with daily.

The above debate over postmodern language highlights another important tension between academia and activism, where the former has traditionally been associated with conveying complex ideas and disseminating information, the former has been understood as advancing social change through political campaigning. Both feminist and queer theory emerged in tandem, or direct collaboration, with political movements against patriarchy, homophobia, and heterosexism (at a cultural, legal, and political level). However, Nussbaum (1999b) argued that gender and sexuality theory drawing on Foucault's understanding of biopower tended to hold 'the fatalistic idea that we are prisoners of an all-enveloping structure of power, and that real-life reform movements usually end up serving power in new and insidious ways' (p. 2). Thus, Butler's suggestion that the only effective way to challenge gender hierarchy is through subversive parody (e.g. drag performance) is read as defeatist. However, the (neo)liberal suggestion for political change advanced by Nusbaum (1999a), Weitzer (2009), and others assumes that a 'free marketplace' of ideas is both possible and publicly available, allowing everyone to choose between competing ideologies. Here too, being able to communicate an idea in popular language (much like advertising a product) is considered central to making the 'best' argument. Postmodernism challenges this liberal worldview not only through its style of communication, but by questioning whether there is only one 'best' idea at all. Perhaps there are multiple ways to think about social problems and advance political change, which may be either complementary or contradictory, but selecting just *one* approach necessarily excludes consideration of others—that's how discourse shapes

power, by making some ideas unimaginable. Modernists see the success of the gay rights movement as evidence that normalisation is the best strategy to follow for achieving rights for all sexual minority groups (Plummer, 1999). From this perspective, postmodernism *seems* philosophical rather than practical because it asks critical questions of such an approach: normalisation of which ideals, who is excluded by this, and why should we desire any norms at all? Answering these questions is not simple, but they are relevant to practical considerations about if and how social movements could be more inclusive and intersectional. The topic of practical policy change will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

The final critique of postmodernism, and social constructivism more broadly, that I will respond to argues that this ‘philosophical’ approach is incompatible with the scientific method and positivist epistemology—paradigms of modernism. As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, while critical of the broad ideology of modernism (including its ethnocentrism, economism, and systems of categorisation), postmodernism also draws on some of its more appealing characteristics, such as scepticism. For example, a defining characteristic of positivism is that scientific theories can be *falsified* by the emergence of new theories or evidence (Popper, 1963). Given this, the view that sex/gender exists as a binary *has* been falsified by biological studies (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Fine, 2017), while the proliferation of sexual identity categories over recent decades *has* demonstrated that previous systems of categorisation were incomplete, if not pointless (Savin-Williams, 2005). In other words, recent science has vindicated many of the arguments made by early postmodern theorists of gender and sexuality. There is now an emerging scientific view that rather than creating an ever-expanding list of categories, the most accurate way to understand genders and sexualities is to take the view that there are as many categories as there are individuals. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault, postmodernism makes a stronger suggestion that we should abandon all methods of classifying, categorising, and documenting people through identity labels, because these processes create their own forms of oppression through the construction of norms. In this chapter, I have emphasised that terms including ‘class’, ‘gender’, ‘sexuality’, and the labels we use to codify them in research, are all (to a significant extent) arbitrary distinctions. There is no ‘best’ or ‘correct’ answer to what makes someone a ‘man’, ‘queer’, or ‘working-class’, but these labels do have significant cultural *meanings*, alongside enduring structural implications. In Chapter Four, I will return to the significance of this for epistemology, social research, and the specific methods used for this study of incidental sex work.

Chapter Four:

Recruitment, Reflexivity, and Research Methods

4.1 Epistemology and Methodology

In the previous chapter, I defined several key concepts in postmodern theories of class, gender, and sexuality which have informed the analysis of this research project. Queer and feminist scholarship has made significant contributions to both the epistemology (theory of knowledge) and methodology (theory of method) of social research. By drawing attention to the effects of power and privilege when gathering information about research participants, this scholarship has refined our approach to collecting and interpreting empirical data, bringing into focus the (often unrecognised) ways in which class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other social characteristics can bias results. Therefore, in this chapter, I will not only outline the methods used for the first ever study of incidental sex work, but also how my position as a researcher is important for interpreting the results presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

The term *epistemology* refers to ‘the study of knowledge and justified belief’, including the methods of enquiry and analysis we use, or how our theories about the world come to be held as valid and true (Steup, 2005). From the eighteenth century (and more precisely, as part of ‘The Enlightenment’), the dominant epistemology in Western societies has been based on the idea that knowledge is obtained through sensory experience, rather than divine revelation, intuition, or introspection. This idea continues to underscore the epistemology of *positivism*, the belief that the scientific method is the best or only way to understand natural phenomena (see 3.1). Under positivism, knowledge is treated as valid only if it can be corroborated by rigorous empirical data collection. The positivist perspective aims to eliminate the ‘effects of the researcher on the data’, to achieve ‘unbiased’ or ‘uncontaminated’ scientific results (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 15). Although some sociologists embrace positivism in their commitment to collecting empirical evidence to support claims, social research is often dismissed by, or viewed as incompatible with, positivism given that our methods lack sufficiently ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ processes of verification and falsification (e.g. a laboratory environment, the ability to repeat experiments, or—in the case of most qualitative research—a large enough sample size). By contrast, most

sociologists recognise that subjectivity and social characteristics may influence, and be influenced by, the data collection process. Since the 1960s, positivism's position as the dominant epistemology has been challenged by social researchers for reasons including:

the fallibility of objective science as conducted by subjective humans; the constructed nature of our world; the inconsistent and variable nature of the social; the impact of researcher worldview on inquiry; the value of the qualitative; the limits of top-down approaches to knowing; and the political nature of knowledge production (O'Leary, 2007, p. 202).

To address these issues, postmodern epistemologies encourage researchers to reflect on our positionality and politics (O'Neill 2001). For example, feminist theorists have drawn attention to the ways in which 'expert' or 'scientific' knowledge tends to enhance the privileged status of some (white, wealthy, cisgender men) while erasing others (people of colour, working-class people, gender and sexual minorities, and women). In other words, there is a 'growing recognition of the politics of knowledge creation', where those who get to define which claims are 'valid' or 'true' also tend to influence society in unequal ways (O'Leary, 2007, p. 196). Making the case for 'feminist science', Cancian (1992) has suggested that researchers should 'reject the positivist ideal of the detached, value-free scientist', while maintaining a commitment to high standards of evidence (p. 623). Cancian adds that feminist methods 'tend to reject a rigid separation between researchers and the researched' by adopting approaches which 'give research subjects more power' (p. 672).

Offering a postmodern critique of academic disciplines based on identity politics, including the research methods which define their boundaries, Brown (1997) has noted how, 'when peered at closely, the definitions of all disciplines wobble, their identities mutate, their rules and regulations appear contingent... in most cases, the desire to persist over time has resulted in a certain conservatism, or its close cousin, methodism' (p. 85). Focusing on the coherence of 'women's studies', Brown adds that, 'any field organized by social identity... is especially vulnerable to losing its *raison d'être* when the coherence or boundedness of its object of study is challenged' (p. 86). This critique is also relevant for the discipline of 'sex work studies', especially given that—as I will argue in this thesis—the shift to digital media has contributed to a destabilisation of traditional sexual boundaries (Jones, 2015). This critique also has implications for methodology, where approaches to participant recruitment may erase or ignore some groups if they do not conform to traditional disciplinary

assumptions about ‘what counts’ (e.g. as a ‘queer person’, ‘woman’, or ‘sex worker’). Indeed, women’s studies and sex work studies share a history, given that many activists and researchers believe that ‘the majority of those who sell sex are women’ (Smith and Mac, 2018, p. 4)—an assumption I will interrogate further in Chapter Eight. Importantly, any methodology which seeks to ‘map’ or ‘model’ the precise numbers of such groups will inevitably encounter problems as their behaviours and identities shift meaning or definition in different and emerging cultural contexts (see Chapters One, Two, and Three). As Sanders et al. (2017) note, because of the ‘proliferation and transient nature of online advertising for sex work, it is impossible to provide a reliable quantitative mapping of online sex work in the UK, or indeed anywhere’ (p. 47), adding that any estimate about the extent or nature of online sex work ‘would be immediately out of date given the fluid and fragile nature of the sex markets online’ (p. 49). Until someone thinks to research or write about a group, they exist outside of our imagination. This is the power of discourse, to shape what can be conceived of as possible. The existence of incidental sex work provides one such example to evidence this claim.

Given the limitations of traditional, positivist, quantitative research methods for understanding the complexity of experiences among (until now) a completely hidden group, this thesis draws on a less restricted approach to participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. Much like the feminist epistemologies mentioned above, one major contribution of queer theory has been to question the certainty of mainstream scientific methods, calling for research to acknowledge those who have been traditionally neglected, including gender and sexual minorities. As such, *queer epistemology* has been defined as a critique of the privileging of heterosexuality through rigid and dualistic ‘sexual categories and classifications’ (Watney, 1994, p. 18), and offers ‘a new way of thinking about power, culture, knowledge and education’ (Masiero, 2017, p. 128). Relatedly, a non-disciplinary, non-rigid methodology has been proposed as important for undertaking research within this framework:

A queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13).

While Halberstam (1998) is sceptical of ‘the traditional social science project of surveying people and expecting to squeeze truth from raw data’ (p. 10)—a perspective sometimes interpreted as positioning queer theory as oppositional to empirical research (see Stein and Plummer, 1995)—Valocchi (2005) has argued that ‘queer theory can be pushed in more sociological directions to deal with the materiality of sex, gender, and sexuality and the role of institutional power in the construction of identities’ (p. 751). Following this general definition of *queer methodology*, this study involved a diverse range of methods to understand an undocumented and unknown population of sexual minority men, including an online survey, in-depth interviews including photo-elicitation procedures, and the use of a ‘sexual orientation form’ (see 4.2 and 4.5). Furthermore, given that incidental sex work has never been studied before, this research project involved many instances of improvisation when gathering information, including some ‘failures’ which I will describe in the next section.

4.2 Online Recruitment

Research about the experiences of sexual minority groups has been critiqued for tending to generalise from unrepresentative samples, or recruit participants who have had particularly negative experiences (Morris, 2018; Savin-Williams, 2005). For example, convenience samples recruited from support groups or counselling services may be more likely to document experiences of mental health problems, relationship breakdown, and social stigma (Savin-Williams, 2001; Walby, 2010). Given the difficulties of finding enough members of (often hidden) sexual minority groups, convenience sampling is common practice in the social and psychological sciences. Alongside the pessimistic bias of media narratives (i.e. bad news sells more copy than good/no news) and policy campaigns (i.e. reports by third sector organisations seek funding to assist with perceived social problems, which may be real, imagined, or exaggerated), the research literature has tended to reinforce a dominant ‘victim narrative’—as applied to sexual minority young people, sex workers, and other groups (Morris, 2018; Steele and Shores, 2017; Sanders, 2005; Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Whether driven by economic incentives, sampling limitations, or political motives, this metanarrative—that sexual minorities are necessarily ‘victims’—has contributed to what I call *discourses of despair* (see 8.3). As in the previous chapter, I use the term ‘discourse’ here to characterise methods of communication which restrict what can be conceived of as

possible (see 3.1). For example, if looking uncritically at (most) news stories, policy reports, and research literature, it becomes difficult to think of gender and sexual minorities as anything other than ‘marginalised’, sex workers as anything other than ‘exploited’, or people living with HIV as anything other than ‘guilty’ of an apparent ‘personal failure’—distinctly neoliberal ideologies.

In seeking to avoid recruiting participants from ‘institutional venues’ which may further perpetuate such discourses through sampling bias, such as LGBTQ social groups, sex worker organisations, or mental health services (see Morris, 2018; Savin-Williams, 2005), an alternative approach turns to digital spaces in which people socialise, organise, and arrange sexual encounters more spontaneously (Mowlabocus, 2010). Recruiting participants online has become a salient option for sexualities researchers seeking to understand diverse and sometimes completely hidden populations (Morris, 2018; Stewart, 2018). The anonymity of internet platforms provides space for those with non-normative sexual desires or identities to express themselves, connect with each other, and potentially facilitate ‘real world’ meetings (Döring, 2009; Gray, 2009). Therefore, the interview participants for this study were recruited using social media platforms, mainly the dating and hook-up app Grindr.

To recruit the participants, I travelled to the most densely populated cities in England and Wales, based on the assumption that a larger sample could be reached in these locations. Based in a central location in each city, I used a ‘research profile’ (see below) to send 3,000 messages to Grindr users whose profiles stated that they were aged between 18 and 28 in Bristol (n = 250), Cardiff (n = 250), Newcastle (n = 250), Southampton (n = 250), Birmingham (n = 400), Liverpool (n = 400), Manchester (n = 400), and London (n = 800). While I selected to stop after sending 250, 400, or 800 messages, these numbers were reflective of different population sizes and response rates in the respective cities. With nearly a 50% response rate overall, this recruitment strategy also generated a survey of 1,473 young urban Grindr users. The initial message I sent read: ‘Hey. Have you ever been offered money for sex online, and said yes? I’m a social researcher looking for people to interview (anonymously) about their experiences. Would you be interested in taking part?’ Among those who responded, 14.6% (n = 215) said that they had been paid for sex on at least one occasion, of whom 2.3% (n = 34) engaged in ‘professional’ sex work such as escorting or pornography, while 8.2% (n = 121) engaged in ‘incidental’ sex work or webcamming—a further 4.1% (n = 60) said “yes” in response to the initial message, but did not respond to

follow-up questions about the types of sex work they performed. While this might suggest that more young men have engaged in ‘incidental’ than ‘professional’ sex work, more robust quantitative research is needed across multiple digital platforms to make such a claim. Furthermore, professional sex workers may simply be less likely to use (or reply to a researcher on) general-purpose, dating or hook-up apps and sites, given that other platforms are available specifically for sex work (Sanders et al., 2017).

Another result of this (incidental) survey of Grindr users was how many responded negatively to my initial question, indicating high levels of sex work stigma based around stereotypes (see 7.6). For example, 66 respondents appeared to be offended that I had even asked the question, saying things such as (to paraphrase, rather than quote directly), ‘Do I look like a prostitute?’, or ‘Do I look like that type of person’—indicating a belief that sex workers ‘look’ a certain, undesirable, and identifiable way. Others used more derogatory language such as ‘skank’, ‘slut’, and ‘whore’ to distance themselves from this perceived sex worker aesthetic. Additionally, several respondents incorrectly believed that I was propositioning them for sex (see below). Among the 215 who responded affirmatively to my initial message, and who were eligible to participate in the study, 44 agreed to be interviewed. In addition to those recruited through Grindr, four participants were recruited through personal social networks after I advertised the study on Facebook and Twitter, and two participants had taken part in an earlier research project which adopted similar digital recruitment strategies (Morris, 2018), bringing the total number of interview participants to 50. Alongside being aged between 18 and 28, it was a requirement of this study that participants did not explicitly advertise as selling sex, making this a defining feature of incidental sex work. As such, this study is based primarily on qualitative interviews with young sexual minority men who agreed to sell sex after being propositioned by other users of social networking sites and smartphone apps.

4.3 Researcher Reflexivity

The term *reflexivity* describes ways in which people reflect on, or become aware of, their own mannerisms, social backgrounds, and subjectivity (Giddens, 1991). Assessing how these ‘intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research’ (Finlay, 2002, p. 210), researcher reflexivity refers to a ‘continuous interrogation’ of the effects we may have on those whose lives we gather information about (Reay, 1996, p. 444), or a process of ‘self-

reflection that allows us to develop ourselves while understanding how we influence and construct the world around us' (O'Leary, 2007, p. 222). The first clear indication that studying incidental sex work was not something which could be done 'objectively' occurred during the participant recruitment stage (see above). Before creating a research profile for this study, I had engaged in informal conversations with young men on dating and hook-up apps such as Grindr, Hornet, and Tinder. When I mentioned the topic of my PhD, I routinely received messages such as, 'Oh yeah, I've done that', or 'Lots of guys have offered me money in the past' (see 6.2). When attempting to recruit participants more systematically, I created a profile on Grindr specifically to advertise the study (I used a different profile on a different mobile device for personal purposes). Alongside the display name "Research", this profile gave a brief summary of 'incidental sex work', the research project's aims, and my institutional affiliation (Durham University). For the research profile photo, I used an image of a hand-made sign which read, 'Have U Ever Been Paid 4 Sex?', constructed from colourful plastic and paper, including banknotes (see Figure 5):



Figure 5: Original (Unsuccessful) Research Profile Photo. (By Max Morris)

Unfortunately, this research profile attracted very few responses. One reason for this may be that the photo gave a different impression than intended. For example, one person who contacted me said, ‘I thought this was some kind of protest’, and another said, ‘I thought you were joking!’ More commonly, older men would send messages propositioning me for sex, in return for money, suggesting that the directness of my recruitment strategy was being misread as a form of advertising. Furthermore, this self-representation may have been too direct and impersonal, especially as no one uses Grindr to participate in research. Therefore, I adopted a less direct, informal approach to visually representing myself and the research, changing the display name to “Maxi” (my nickname) and the profile photo to one of me sitting casually in a café. By making the profile less conspicuous, significantly more users began to respond to my initial question, as described above. I maintained the same profile photo and text in all eight cities where I messaged participants directly (see Bonner-Thompson, 2017 for a similar approach to participant recruitment on Grindr).

Thinking reflexively about both the recruitment and research methods, it is important to address how I may have influenced (a) those who responded to my messages, and (b) how my personal characteristics, including age, ethnicity, and sexuality, may have shaped the interview encounters. Given the limited success I had in recruiting participants, at first, it is evident that using a photo which clearly showed my face was influential. On the one hand, a reason for this may be because those who responded found my appearance attractive, making them less likely to ignore messages or block the research profile. Conversely, those who did not respond may have found my appearance unattractive. As Bonner-Thompson (2017) noted about using Grindr to recruit participants for a study on masculinity, ‘I used the phrase “looking for research participants only”, alongside details about the project as a way to “separate” myself from Grindr users. However, I still received multiple sexually suggestive and explicit messages and pictures’ (p. 5). Relatedly, Walby (2010) has written about some of the dilemmas of conducting research with online male escorts, noting how he avoided answering questions about his own sexuality, given that some participants could (and did) sexualise the research encounters by positioning him as a potential sex partner. To counter this, Walby sought to create distance from the participants by presenting himself as ‘a professional sociologist conducting a rigorous study concerning male-for-male internet escorting’ (p. 652). While I did not adopt all of Walby’s strategies (e.g. wearing formal clothing during the interviews), I also sought to present the research as professionally as possible in both online and offline communications with the participants. Unlike Walby,

however, when asked about my sexual identity by the participants, I was open about being a young sexual minority man, like them. Positioning myself as an ‘insider’—similar to the participants in age, gender, and sexuality—helped to reduce social distance and promote reciprocal disclosure during the interviews. For example, there was no need for participants to explain aspects of queer culture, vocabulary, or sexuality—something I have characterised as forms of (cultural) gay capital elsewhere (Morris, 2018)—which they might have felt more necessary with a straight researcher. This mutual understanding and willingness to reciprocate, by answering their questions about me directly, further aligned with my goal to treat the participants as peers, rather than ‘objects’ or ‘subjects’ of academic curiosity (Ashford, 2009b). This aligns with the contribution to knowledge production processes made by feminist and queer theorists discussed the start of this chapter. Furthermore, given the covert nature of incidental sex work, and the role of sexual and social stigma in policing people’s openness, breaking down these boundaries between researcher and participant (as far as possible) may be the best way to gather information about such a group (see 8.6).

Other dimensions of reflexivity include class and ethnicity, which can create symbolic distance between researchers and participants (Reay, 1996). Although I do not tend to think of myself as ‘middle-class’ based on family background or income (economic capital), as a doctoral research student who spoke with a Southern English accent (forms of cultural capital), it was likely that I was read as such by the participants. Lynch and O’Neill (1994) have suggested that ‘one loses one’s defining social class identity in part if not in whole’ through higher education qualifications (p. 319), while Reay (1996) has suggested that becoming an academic is ‘an erosion of working-classness’ (p. 453), something which may have created social distance between me and the participants from more traditionally working-class backgrounds, with regional accents, or less educational capital (see 4.4). Similarly, my ethnicity may have shaped how participants discussed issues such as racism (see 5.7 and 7.4). As a white person, it is also more likely that I will have missed subtler cues or hints given by participants of colour about their experiences, as they pertain to race inequality, including issues of implicit bias (Izumi, 2010). To illustrate the significance of such researcher effect, it is useful to provide an overview of the participants, including their class identities, ethnicity, and geographical distribution (see below).

Another important aspect of researcher reflexivity is considering how I was influenced by the participants. Having spent a year socialising with young sexual minority men through Grindr, usually meeting in informal settings such as bars and cafés to conduct

the interviews, our interactions before, during, and after the interview encounters were often personally meaningful. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter One, my entry into sex work research began and continues to be motivated by a form of activism. Williams (1993) has argued that ‘those researchers who have personal motivations do better research’—something which Ashford (2009b) suggests ‘may take the form of the “activist” researcher who is openly pursuing a political, social or cultural agenda... The “activist” identity attributes a “worthiness” to the researcher identity that moves the identity beyond “sex”’ (p. 301). I note this because my political ‘agenda’ did change as a consequence of the conversations I had with participants, principally around the theme of queer theory as a critique of liberalism and positivist epistemology (see 5.2). Although I anticipate that many readers will want to know whether I have engaged in incidental sex work, as will become clear in the following chapters, how we define ‘sex’, ‘sex work’, and ‘incidental sex work’ may be so malleable that I am not sure how to answer this question. Does incidental sex work have to be arranged online (see 6.2)? Does sex have to be emotionally engaging to ‘count’ as casual or commercial, or not (see 6.7)? Is sex in a long-term relationship, where one partner pays the bills and rent, any different from sex which is directly paid for (see 8.6)? These are similar questions to those posed by feminist theorists, who suggested that distinguishing between ‘marriage’ and ‘prostitution’—both of which could be understood as contractual agreements which result in the exchange of sex for income—was difficult, if not impossible (e.g. Beauvoir, 1949; Shrage, 1994). As I will argue, by drawing on the narratives of the participants in this study, distinguishing between paid and unpaid forms of sex remains a convoluted problem with no simple answer.

4.4 The Participants

The 50 young men interviewed for this study lived in urban areas across England and Wales, including 5 in South Wales, 5 in South West England, 5 in the Midlands, 7 in South East England, 8 in North East England, 10 in North West England, and 10 in Greater London. Given changing social attitudes towards sexuality and the use of digital media over recent years, this study focused exclusively on the experiences of young sexual minority men, sometimes described as millennials. Furthermore, this age group is part of the developmental stage described by Arnett (2004) as ‘emerging adulthood’, characterised by a freedom to explore one’s identity and lifestyle choices before taking up the responsibilities of adulthood—an opportune time for young sexual minority men to explore the possibility of

selling sex online. I focused recruitment on densely populated cities because dating and hook-up apps such as Grindr tend to be more widely used in urban areas, also making it more likely that users would be propositioned to engage in incidental sex work. The geographical distribution of participants was broadly reflective of UK population density in England and Wales according to the 2011 census. The map below highlights the locations in which the qualitative interviews took place, close to where the participants lived, worked, and studied (see Figure 6):

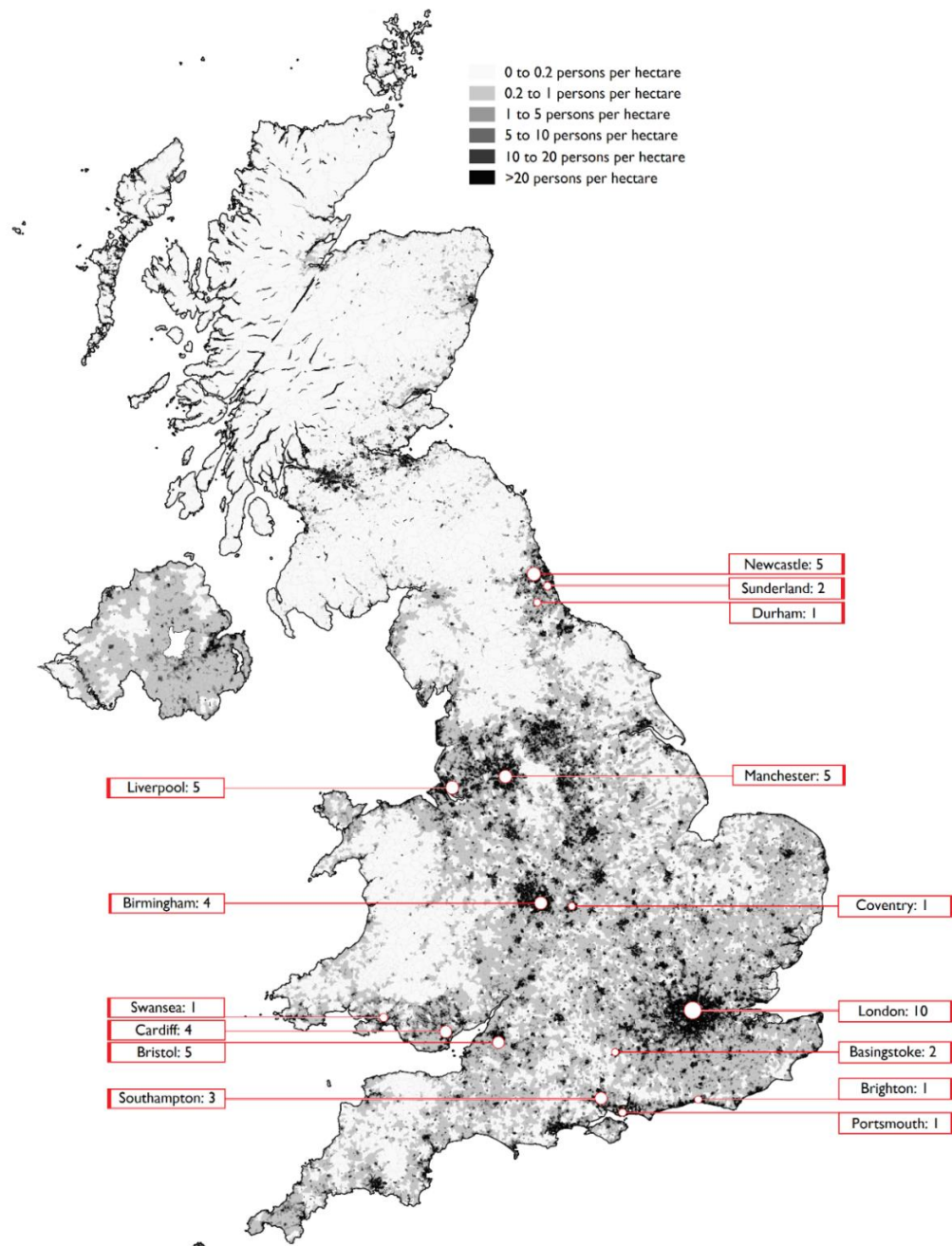


Figure 6: Interview Locations on ‘Map of population density in the UK’ (By SkateTier)

At the very start of the interviews, participants were asked to provide basic background details about themselves, including their age, class, and ethnicity. Given that recruitment focused on young men, all participants were between the ages of 18 and 28, with a median age of 22. Comparable to other research projects with online sex workers (Bernstein, 2007; Bimbi, 2007; Sanders et al., 2017; Walby, 2012), the class backgrounds of this sample were diverse. Four participants identified as ‘upper-middle-class’, 20 as ‘middle-class’, and 26 as ‘working-class’. These self-identifications were corroborated by follow-up questions about secondary education (e.g. eight participants described attending private or grammar schools) and parental occupation and income (e.g. six participants described being raised in low-income, single parent households). Concerning ethnicity, 2 participants identified as ‘Asian’, 5 as ‘black’, 5 as ‘mixed’, and 38 as ‘white’ British. This study did not involve any migrants who sold sex incidentally, a neglected group within sex work research more broadly (Jones, 2015). In Chapter Five, I explore intersections of class, ethnicity, and religion in the ‘coming out’ narratives of the participants further (see 5.4).

Sociologists have highlighted how broad labels such as ‘middle-class’ and ‘working-class’ may be adopted differently by research participants in relation to what is considered ‘ordinary’ (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2001). Of note, only 7 of the 23 participants based in the Midlands and Northern England identified as ‘middle-class’, compared with 17 of the 27 based in Southern England and Wales. This geographical difference may stem from the varying significance of class labels across British regions, particularly following deindustrialisation of the 1980s, something which intensified socio-economic inequality, or the so-called ‘north-south divide’ (Martin, 1988). Adding further complexity to these labels, several participants described their class identities as shifting over time, mainly due to attending university or moving into professional careers—comparable to the forms of cultural capital I described myself ‘attaining’ above. Similarly, highlighting high levels of educational capital among online sex workers (see also Jenkins, 2009; Sanders, et al. 2017; Walby, 2012), 12 participants were educated to degree level or higher, with half still enrolled in full-time education (4 sixth-form, 15 undergraduate and 6 postgraduate students). By comparison, 23 of the 30 professional online male escorts interviewed by Walby (2012) had enrolled in or graduated from university, while 35% and 37% of online male sex workers surveyed by Jenkins (2009) and Sanders et al. (2017), respectively, were educated to degree level or higher. Of the 25 participants not in education, one was a primary school teacher, four were healthcare professionals, four were retail sector employees, six worked in bars and

restaurants, eight held other service sector jobs, and two were unemployed. As illustrated in the results, ‘low income’ and being a ‘poor student’ were both identified as motivating factors for selling sex, something linked to these class identities and occupations (see 7.2).

4.5 Interview Procedures

To understand the experiences of young men who engaged in incidental sex work, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were the primary method of data collection. The interviews took place between May 2015 and April 2016. The primary research questions underpinning this project were:

- What are the experiences of young men who sell sex ‘incidentally’ using social networking sites and smartphone apps?
- How does incidental sex work differ from other forms of sex work described in the existing literature?
- What implications do these narratives have for sex work policy and theory?

Alongside questions about background details (see above), at the very start of the interviews, all participants were asked to complete a nine-point ‘sexual orientation form’ (exclusively gay, gay, mostly gay, bisexual leaning gay, bisexual, bisexual leaning straight, mostly straight, straight, or exclusively straight). Borrowed from recent psychological studies of sexual variation (Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2017), this extended version of the Kinsey scale (see Figure 1) asked participants to indicate their ‘current’, ‘future’, and ‘ideal’ understandings of their sexuality by ticking, crossing, and circling an answer on the scale respectively. In Chapter Five, I draw on this information to elaborate on how participants understood their own and other people’s sexuality as a fixed or fluid characteristic, alongside their attitudes towards sexual politics more broadly. Adopting an open, semi-structured approach to the interviews also created space for in-depth discussions about the forms, what they meant, and how participants answered them.

Using semi-structured interviews facilitated free-flowing conversations, allowing participants to ‘discuss their experiences of sex work within a relatively open framework’ (Connell and Hart, 2003, p. 12), while drawing out relevant information about their experiences of coming out as sexual minority men, agreeing to sell sex online, and their views about topics ranging from criminal law to sexual norms. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. The interview schedule was divided into three sections focusing on

‘Understanding Sexuality’, ‘Experiences of Selling Sex’, and ‘Thoughts and Feelings’. Given that the interview schedule influenced how the results were coded and analysed, I have included it in full here:

Understanding Sexuality

- How would you describe your class and ethnicity?
- Talk me through how you completed the sexual orientation form.
- Can you say more about your current, future, and ideal understandings of yourself?
- When and how did you ‘come out’ to others about your sexuality?
- What is your view of LGBTQ politics, or pride events?
- How do you define sex?
- Tell me about the first time you had sex.
- How many sexual partners have you had?
- How would you describe your role in sex?

Experiences of Selling Sex

- Tell me about the first time you were paid for sex.
- Tell me about the man who paid you (age, ethnicity, body type, personality traits, etc).
- What did you do together?
- Were there any emotional aspects to the encounter?
- How was it different from other sexual experiences that you’ve had?
- What were your motivations?
- Talk me through how the exchange was negotiated.
- How did you spend the money?
- How many times have you been paid for sex since? [Repeat Above Questions]

Thoughts and Feelings

- Can you see yourself selling sex again in the future?
- Do you have any particularly memorable experiences?
- Have you encountered any problems or challenges in selling sex?
- Who knows that you’ve been paid for sex?
- What have their responses been like?
- Would you identify with labels such as ‘escort’, ‘rent boy’, or ‘sex worker’?

- If not, how would you describe it?
- Have you ever performed webcam shows?
- How much do you know about the law around selling sex?
- Do you agree with the law (as you understand it)?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

This schedule only offers a guide to how the interview encounters progressed. Sometimes questions were asked in a different order and follow-up questions were included to elicit further details about interesting topics of conversation (Walby, 2012).

In addition to the questions above, towards the end of the interviews, participants were asked, ‘Can you show me and talk me through your profile photo?’ Visual methods have contributed significantly to sex work research (O’Neill, 2010; Whowell, 2010), emphasising the sensorial aspects of spaces in which sex work is performed (Atkins and Laing, 2012). For example, noting a range of subtle gestures—including ways of dressing and patterns of movement—Whowell (2010) has used the term ‘sexual choreographies’ to characterise ways in which young men engage in sex work subversively. Furthermore, research in queer digital spaces such as Gaydar and Grindr has highlighted the centrality of visual media in sociological analysis of sexual minority men’s online self-representation, including displays of hegemonic masculinity and sexualised ‘ideals’ (Bonner-Thompson, 2017; Mowlabocus, 2010; Siibak, 2010). Using geolocation technology, it is also important to recognise how geography is central to such apps, where ‘material and digital practices and localities become entangled in the visual’ (Bonner-Thompson, 2017). Thus, adopting profile photo-elicitation procedures during the interviews not only facilitated further discussion about dating and hook-up apps, including experiences of sexual discrimination on such platforms, but also created space for participants to describe how they represented and saw themselves (McLelland, 2002). This section of the interviews was the primary source of evidence for how participants understood themselves as having a high level of erotic capital (Hakim, 2010), an important theme in this thesis (see 5.6 and 8.4).

4.6 Analysis of Transcripts

The interviews were audio-recorded on a smartphone, transcribed digitally, then printed to allow for handwritten annotation during the coding process. Combined, the length of the transcripts was over 325,000 words, forming the evidence base for the results sections

presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven (see below). In addition to the transcripts, I kept a collection of notes about additional aspects of the interview encounters, such as hand gestures and facial expressions, which were relevant for understanding emphasis and meaning, alongside visual information about the Grindr profiles during photo-elicitation procedures (see above) which could not be picked up by the audio-recordings alone. The results were organised around themes which emerged inductively throughout both the data collection and analysis processes (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). For most of the major themes identified below, data saturation was achieved fairly early on—after half of the participants had been interviewed—including how they identified (see 7.5) and their knowledge of the law (see 7.8). While these themes emerged in response to specific questions (e.g. ‘How much do you know about the law?’ and ‘Would you identify with labels such as sex worker?’), others emerged from a variety of different questions and discussion topics, including the regulatory effects of sexual norms and social stigma (see 5.5 and 7.6). Another approach to coding the transcripts involved placing the participants in ‘clusters’ based on class, ethnicity, or the number of times they agreed to sell sex (between one and fifty times). The more open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews allowed for further exploration of some themes with the participants who had not yet been interviewed, including whether they agreed with my interpretation of the themes identified thus far. In this way, participants contributed to the analysis directly at an early stage, providing a form of member check (Koelsch, 2013). Another way in which the reliability of the results was assured was through ongoing discussions and sharing of results with PhD supervisors, who noted topics and themes of significance as they related to the wider literature on sexual minority men, sex work, and social media. As such, this thesis adopted a modified grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), combining inductive thematic coding with existing theory (see Chapter Three), to produce empirically grounded concepts which also draw on and make comparisons with the existing literature (Urquhart, 2013). This approach also explicitly recognises that social researchers cannot be ‘value free’ (Cancian, 1992), that the methods and themes we choose to investigate are shaped by, and contribute to, discourses which define the parameters of our fields of research (Phoenix, 1999).

Divided into three chapters, the themes identified by this approach are represented in 24 sub-sections, titled: (5.1) ‘Sexual Behaviour, Identity, and Orientation’, (5.2) ‘Queer Critiques and Romantic Attraction’, (5.3), ‘Coming Out in Stages’, (5.4) ‘Religiosity, Respectability, and Rurality’, (5.5) ‘The Politics of Normativity’, (5.6) ‘Symbolic Economies

of Class, Gender, and Sexuality’, (5.7) ‘Digital Inequalities’, (5.8) ‘Queer Definitions of Sex’; (6.1) ‘Erotic, Emotional, and Economic Exchanges’, (6.2) ‘Arranging to Meet Online’, (6.3) ‘The Clients’, (6.4) ‘Sex Acts, Roles, and Preferences’, (6.5) ‘Kinky Sex and Negotiated Consent’, (6.6) ‘Webcamming’, (6.7) ‘Emotional Connectivity’, (6.8) ‘Difference from “Regular” Sex’; (7.1) ‘Money Made from Incidental Sex Work’, (7.2) ‘Economic Motivations’, (7.3) ‘Sexual Motivations’, (7.4) ‘Exploitation Narratives’, (7.5) ‘Incidental Identities’, (7.6) ‘Stigma and stereotypes’, (7.7) ‘Secrecy and Surveillance’, (7.8) ‘Misinformed (about) Laws’. The arrangement of these broad thematic chapters and sections was influenced by both the interview schedule (see above) and to communicate the key results in a linear, narrative structure which reflects the complexity of how participants shared their stories with me (Plummer, 1999; Walby, 2012). Although qualitative research cannot make statistically generalisable claims, it can interrogate longstanding assumptions and beliefs held by policy makers, researchers, and others, further contributing to conceptual analysis that informs existing law, media, and theory. As the first ever empirical study of incidental sex work, this thesis attempts to highlight key themes to begin a conversation about changing and emerging forms of commercial sex in queer digital spaces, while recognising that such results may pose more questions than answers (see 8.6 for further discussion of methodological limitations and future directions for research).

4.7 Ethical Considerations

This research project about the experiences of young sexual minority men who engaged in incidental sex work was granted ethical approval by Durham University. Potential problems highlighted during the ethics review process included: ‘Discussion of sex work, sexual attitudes, behaviours, and identities may cause discomfort’, ‘Disclosure of experience of sexual harm and violence, or domestic violence’, and ‘Discussion of online photos and videos (including ‘webcam shows’) [which] may raise issues around the sharing of intimate images and videos without consent (e.g. ‘revenge pornography’)’. Given these concerns, several support services were listed, which participants could be directed to if requested during the interviews. All participants were also given institutional contact information for my supervisors and I, should they have any concerns or follow-up questions. While several of these ‘sensitive issues’ did emerge during the interviews (see 6.5 and 7.8), none of the participants were interested in accessing support services. Several participants also disclosed experiences of non-consensual sex and abusive behaviour, usually unrelated to their

experiences of selling sex. I have not included these stories here, given that they were not directly relevant to the topic of enquiry for this thesis. Although it was not anticipated that participants would disclose any illegal behaviours, given that all were aged 18 or above, several did recount experiences of underage sex, drug consumption, and similar activities (see 7.8). This is one reason that all identifying information about the participants has been removed to protect their anonymity, alongside their ‘clients’ (given the potential for current or future legal interventions). This follows a tradition of sexualities research (e.g. Humphreys, 1970) where the illegality of some sexual behaviours and identities has prompted reactionary state interventions to ‘controversial’ research findings. At this stage, there would be no way to identify anyone who participated in this study unless they volunteered that information.

Research about sexualities is often framed as a ‘dangerous’ or ‘risky’ subject. For example, questions posed by the ‘Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Form’ for this study included: ‘Could the study cause harm, discomfort, stress, anxiety or any other negative consequence beyond the risks encountered in normal life? Does the research address a sensitive topic?’ with a footnote adding, ‘Sensitive topics can include participants’ sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their gender or ethnic status’ (p. 5). Generally, I am opposed to the framing of sexualities research in these terms, given that it reinforces a narrow discourse of sex negativity (Rubin, 1984). Rather, I followed the lead of participants on whether their experiences were defined as ‘dangerous’, ‘risky’, ‘stressful’, or not.

Interviews were conducted in semi-public spaces such as quiet cafés, bars, parks, local libraries, or university buildings. Before recording began, all participants were given an information sheet explaining what the study was about, how the interviews would be recorded and transcribed, for use in this thesis and other publications. They were also guaranteed the right ‘to refuse to answer any questions’ and ‘withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons and without penalty’. The section on confidentiality read as follows:

The information you provide will be treated with absolute confidence and stored in a secure location – either a password-protected computer or a locked filing cabinet. Any information that could identify you will be changed during transcription to protect your anonymity.

As such, all the participant names used in this thesis have been changed. The only possible exception to full anonymity was ‘if you disclose information which poses a risk of significant and immediate harm to yourself or others’, something which did not occur. All participants were asked to sign a consent form, which included tick boxes to confirm that they (1) ‘had the opportunity to ask questions’, (2) ‘agree to participate in this research project’, (3), ‘agree to the interview being recorded and transcribed’, (4) ‘understand that the information... will be kept anonymous and confidential’, (5) ‘understand that confidentiality may be breached only if there is a risk of significant and immediate harm’, (6) ‘understand that anonymised extracts from this interview may be incorporated into [this] thesis’, (7) ‘understand that participation in the study is entirely voluntary’, and that (8) if they chose to withdraw from the project any data ‘provided will be destroyed and not used in any future publications’. Contact information for my institution, including the emails of my PhD supervisors, was included if they had any additional questions or complaints following the interviews. All guidelines set out by the British Sociological Association and Economic and Social Research Council frameworks have been adhered to.

Chapter Five:

Sexual Minority Men and Social Change

5.1 Sexual Behaviour, Identity, and Orientation

In the previous chapter I noted how researchers have tended to conflate three different measures of sexuality (behaviour, identity, and orientation), while neglecting the complex ways in which these characteristics may—or may not—align (Savin-Williams, 2005). Furthermore, by focusing on just one characteristic as the ‘best’ or ‘only’ measure (e.g. treating sexual orientation as a biological fact based on genetics, hormones, or neuroscience) fails to account for other dimensions of sexuality such as the intensity of desire, emotional or romantic attraction, or how sexuality changes over time (Diamond, 2008; Walton, Lykins, and Bhullar, 2016). By asking participants to complete a sexual orientation form at the start of the interviews, space was created for conversations about these issues (see 4.5). Based on these forms, 19 participants identified their *current* understanding of themselves as ‘exclusively gay’, 12 as ‘gay’, 11 as ‘mostly gay’, and 7 as ‘bisexual leaning gay’. Half of the participants ticked, crossed, and circled the same option for each question, suggesting a stable understanding of their sexuality across time, as well as comfort with these labels. Beginning with the largest group (those who were exclusively gay), this section will explore how participants understood their own, and other people’s, sexualities as a more ‘fixed’ or ‘fluid’ characteristic. I will suggest that such perspectives also related to whether gender and sexuality were understood as biologically essentialist, or socially constructed characteristics (see 3.3, 3.4, and 5.1).

Among the 19 participants who described their current sexuality as exclusively gay, most thought of sexuality as an essential and unchanging characteristic. For example, Luke said, ‘I don’t have any interest in the opposite sex, I never have’, and Alfie said, ‘I am sexually and romantically attracted to guys only, always have been, and I have zero interest in girls’. Similarly, Connor said, ‘I can appreciate the attraction, the beauty of women, but I do not want to have sex with them, and I wouldn’t want to any time in the future’, and Jeremy said, ‘I understand women’s appeal to straight men, but I’m 100% gay, and I always will be’. Eleven participants suggested that both their sexual behaviours (with men or women) and desires (for men or women) were significant for defining themselves as *exclusively* gay. For example, Dan said, ‘I am only attracted to men, I only have sex with

men, I'm not attracted to women at all', and Scott said, 'I can't say I've ever had any major experiences with a girl, or ever desired to do so, at all. I've never found a woman attractive'. Expressing a stronger aversion to the idea of having sex with women, Alex said, 'Have you seen the film *Teeth*? That's it for me. I have no attraction to women, I'm scared about what will happen if I put it in there', while Dean suggested that his exclusively gay identity had to be 'redeemed' after a single heterosexual experience:

I am only sexually attracted to men. I have had sex with one girl before, when I was about seventeen, but I made up for it by sleeping with her boyfriend, so I balanced it out, I redeemed myself a little bit.

Although recognising that sexual fluidity existed in other people, Dean added, 'I just can't see myself changing. I've never had to, or felt the need to, be straight... I don't want to change'. While some of these narratives could be interpreted as dismissive of (or derogatory towards) women, they also suggested that identifying as 'exclusively gay' is partly determined by one's sexual behaviour, only with members of the 'same sex'.

Relatedly, 3 of the 12 participants who identified as gay, but not exclusively so, held that sexual behaviour was a factor in how they responded to the sexual orientation form. For example, Freddy said, 'For where I am currently, I put gay, "Nearly always sexually attracted to the same sex, rarely sexually attracted to the opposite sex", because I have actually had sex with two girls before'. Describing these experiences, he added, 'They were my first sexual encounters, so I have a feeling it was more about trying to fit in, but as I have managed to have sex with the opposite sex, I can't say I am 100% gay, because of that'. Similarly, the main reason Ryan did not identify as exclusively gay was because, 'I've had sexual relationships with women before'. Offering a more nuanced account of gender as biologically determined, but sexuality as socially constructed, he added:

To me, sexuality and gender are totally different concepts. Gender is just genitalia. That's how you were born, your biology. Then sexuality, you can choose your sexuality, in a sense. So that's about who you choose to share your body with, and it's a lot more complex than straight, gay, or bi. Because you get straight men who have sex with men. They make a choice to have sex with a man, but they're not considered by society to be gay. People's sexuality can change due to geography, and age, and experimenting, too. So, I don't consider sexuality to be how you're born.

In these examples, sexual behaviour was still associated with one's sexual identity and orientation, where not having sex with women—viewed as the 'opposite' sex—was considered necessary for defining oneself as (exclusively) gay. Alongside exploring how the participants thought about sexual identity and orientation, I highlight these narratives to draw comparisons with how they made sense of labels such as 'sex worker', as determined by behaviour and identity in Chapter Seven (see 7.5).

By contrast with the narratives above, 8 of the 19 participants who identified as exclusively gay, and 9 of the 12 participants who identified as gay, did not view behaviour as a relevant factor for defining one's sexual identity or orientation. For example, George said, 'I consider myself exclusively gay. I have slept with girls in the past, but that was just the norm, because of the kind of people who were around me... I didn't want them to think I was gay'. Holding a less rigid perspective on sexuality, he added, 'I see it as something fluid. If I woke up one day and wanted to have sex with women, I would be like, "OK, fine, whatever". I don't see that happening, but I wouldn't mind'. Also identifying as exclusively gay, Blake said, 'I have never, ever, ever been attracted to a woman... But, I mean, I'm always open to it because I like the idea of being more open and fluid'. The association between being 'open' and viewing sexuality as something 'fluid' was also expressed by Ryan (see above), who said, 'I consider myself open minded. I just prefer sex with guys. It's funny, because a lot of my gay friends have never had sex with women before, but I'm quite experimental'. Despite saying, 'I've only ever been sexually attracted to men, I can't remember being sexually attracted to a woman without there being a man involved somehow', Amir also chose not to identify as exclusively gay because, 'you never know what might happen', and Paul said, 'I would class myself as gay, almost exclusively. I've slept with women when I was younger... and I could see it happening again, possibly as part of a group situation'. Thus, greater openness to having sex with women correlated with a view of sexuality which was less essentialist, alongside a belief that their own sexuality might change over time. Furthermore, for most participants, engaging exclusively in sexual behaviours with the 'same sex' was not held as central to categorising one's sexuality, placing greater emphasis on desire and identity.

The association between 'open mindedness' and 'sexual fluidity' was more pronounced among the 18 participants who identified as either mostly gay or bisexual leaning gay, who also voiced stronger opposition to being narrowly labelled in just one category. For example, Jaspal said, 'I am very open minded. I don't want to close myself off to being gay

only. I want to be bisexual, so I can have a strong connection with a guy or a girl, if they're meant for me' (original emphasis). Similarly, Matt said, 'I would never pigeon-hole anything 100%', Brandon said, 'Some people are fluid constantly, some people are very straight-forward, as to what they want... I'm probably more in the first group', and Greg said, 'The way I see the world is quite open minded, I wouldn't necessarily want to categorise myself within a specific box... If I had to identify myself, I would choose bisexual, but generally I wouldn't really like to be labelled or put into a box'. Describing his own sexual fluidity in more detail, Greg added:

It fluctuates, I'd say. There are some days where I find myself much more attracted to girls, and I'll be thinking of girls, memories of being a teenager and having obsessions with girls all the time. But most of the time, I would say I'm more attracted to guys, recently. As I say, it changes. Sometimes you wake up in the morning and find yourself going on—if you're into social apps—going on Tinder rather than going on Grindr, just having the urge to meet a girl as opposed to a guy.

Also describing his own sexuality as fluid, Will said, 'I didn't even put a label on it, before. Then I was like, "Oh, my attraction has changed". I definitely think it's fluid, because mine has changed, so it must be'. In previous research projects adopting the 9-point sexual orientation forms used for this study (e.g. Savin-Williams et al. 2016), self-identified labels of exclusively gay, mostly gay, and bisexual leaning gay were understood as 'multiple overlapping categories', drawing on traditional psychological and sexological (positivist) methods of measurement (p. 2). However, not all of the participants agreed with my use of this research method, which I turn to next.

5.2 Queer Critiques and Romantic Attraction

Despite half of the participants viewing their own sexuality as a fixed characteristic, almost all believed that sexuality could be a more fluid feature of other people's identities (see Diamond, 2008). For example, when asked, 'To what extent do you see sexuality as something fixed or fluid?' (an additional question not part of the interview schedule, see 4.5), Elliott said, 'I think it can change, and it's different for every person. I haven't experienced it, so I don't necessarily understand it, but I believe that it's happening', before adding, 'I think it's a complete spectrum—although I suppose there's a difference between it being fluid and it being a spectrum. It's just down to the individual'. Similarly, Ethan said, 'Yeah, I think it's

completely fluid, and the labels that exist are just there to help people understand, and identify where they are in that spectrum, or where other people are in that spectrum'. Alongside viewing sexuality as a spectrum, several participants described having friends whose sexuality had changed with time. For example, Paul said, 'Yeah, I think sexuality is probably a fluid thing. One of my housemates is lesbian, or she was lesbian, but now she's with a guy. Why box yourself into one, when you don't know what might happen?' These participants rejected essentialist views of sexuality as biologically determined categories, rather than individual choices (within a limited range of cultural options). Opposing the 'born this way' narrative (Johnston, 2015), Luke said, 'You're not stuck, you know, you're not born and then you're going to be gay or bisexual. I'm not saying that I'm fluid, but obviously, you see some people who—I'm not going to say they "fit the box", because obviously that contradicts the whole point'. Luke added, 'Currently, I definitely see myself as gay... but I wasn't 100% sure about my future, because I agree with the whole fluid sexuality thing. I just can't see myself with a woman in the long term'. Although comfortable being labelled or labelling themselves as 'gay', these perspectives highlighted a more complex understanding of sexuality than 'tick box' approaches allow for (see Diamond, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Savin-Williams, 2005).

One of the main ways in which fixed understandings of sexual orientation were challenged by the participants was through the notion of sexualities existing on a spectrum (see above). Several participants drew on Kinsey's research to make this point (see 2.3), as it applied to their own sexual fluidity. For example, Peter said, 'If we're talking about sexual arousal, I don't want to use the Kinsey scale, but if six is totally homosexual, and zero is totally heterosexual, I'd probably say I'm four and a half, or maybe up to five'. Similarly, Tim said, 'I've flicked through the Wikipedia entry on Kinsey, so I know that sexuality is a scale, and most people are bisexual to some degree', before adding, 'If someone said to me, "Where do you want to be on the scale?", I would quite happily move to bisexual, because that significantly increases the number of potential people I could do things with'. Arguing that the Kinsey scale should be more widely known, Tim added, 'In an ideal world, everyone would be bisexual, and aware of that, and comfortable with that' (see 5.5 for further discussion of bisexual erasure). Using the Kinsey scale to describe how his sexuality had changed with time, Will said:

I put myself as “mostly gay”, because that’s where it is *now*. In the past, I was further down the scale—I did this before with the Kinsey scale—and now I’m a five, but I used to be a four. It just changed, I can’t explain how or why (original emphasis).

Awareness of the Kinsey scale was particularly evident among university-educated participants, who had access to a wider vocabulary to articulate the diversity of their sexual behaviours, identities, and orientations, alongside how these may change in different social contexts (see 4.4 and 5.6 for further discussion of class and educational capital).

Several participants were critical of the sexual orientation form, and other measures of sexuality, adopting a queer perspective which opposed its use of the sex/gender binary. This further contributed to my questioning of the epistemological and methodological assumptions I had begun this project with (see 8.6). For example, Rick was critical of the form’s use of attraction to the ‘same’ or ‘opposite’ sex to classify sexuality:

I don’t agree with the whole “opposite sex, same sex” thing, really. For a start, I don’t think men are the “opposite” of women, in any sense. I’m read as male, in most circumstances, obviously these casual dating apps are a good example of that, but I am gender nonconforming and think of myself as kind of equally—to put it another way—equally bad at being masculine and bad at being feminine.

Despite drawing on the Kinsey scale to explain his sexual fluidity above, Will was similarly critical of gender assumptions made in the sexual orientation form:

Because now we understand gender as being a spectrum, my attraction is more towards—saying attraction to cis men doesn’t make sense, because I’m also attracted to people who are gender nonconforming, but who present as masculine, or genderfluid people, and even if they present as masculine, say if they’re gender conforming but they wear make-up or something like that, I’m still attracted to them. I think it’s less of a sexual attraction to men over women, and more of an attraction to certain cis men, but also non-cis men. Make sense?

Both Rick and Will preferred to use ‘queer’, as a post-identity identity label (Butler, 1990). Given their critique of the sexual orientation form, asked how they would identify, Rick added, ‘I guess gender nonconforming gay man, but person is fine’, before asking, ‘Can I just put queer?’ Asked when and how they started using this label, Will said, ‘Identifying as queer? It was online stuff, at school, researching it. I’ve thought a lot about political people

who are into this kind of thing, and just naturally, talking to people online, they're tuned into this stuff as well, so that's where it comes from', before suggesting that no other labels had felt right for him:

For me, identifying as queer is a bigger thing, because I had all these years of thinking, "Oh, am I bi, am I gay, am I something else?" I identified as pansexual for a while, but that didn't feel right either... By saying I'm queer, I'm not giving myself this specific label, it's easier.

Rick and Will's rejection of the limitations imposed by rigid systems of classification highlight a flaw with my use of the sexual orientation forms, even if they encouraged open-ended conversations about sexuality, during which these issues could be raised (see 4.5). Reflecting how this methodological problem pervades research about sexualities, Rick also said, 'In the end, the academy is still so essentialist, but I'm not an expert', while Brandon said, 'I try not to put labels on it, but then you have to describe it somehow'. Had participants been given more options, or greater flexibility in defining themselves, I suspect more would have identified as 'queer' or used different labels.

Another limitation to research which tends to rely on essentialist (biological) understandings of sexual orientation is the exclusion of other (social) measures of sexuality, such as emotional attraction. Alongside the 2 participants who identified as 'queer', 4 used the terms 'pansexual' or 'panromantic' to characterise aspects of their attraction to another person's personality, rather than their sex/gender. For example, Ethan said:

I view sexual attraction and emotional attraction as two completely different things. So, I would label myself as "homosexual", but possibly panromantic, because emotionally I feel that I could be attracted to anyone. Why should someone's genitalia stop me from being attracted to their personality?

Much like Will (see above), Ethan used this perspective to critique the sexual orientation form by saying, 'The questions all refer to sexual attraction, and I'm definitively attracted to the male body... but I couldn't say that I would never fall in love with a female's personality or have some form of sexless relationship'. Although most of the participants were unfamiliar with terms such as 'panromantic', emotional attraction was a major theme across this sample, and an important dimension of how participants understood their sexualities. For example, Elliott said, 'I put "mostly gay", because sometimes I find women attractive, but I'd rather be with a man. I think a lot of that comes from, not the physical attraction, but the

companionship element, the type of person I fall for'. Asked what it meant to 'fall for' someone, he added, 'It's the emotional engagement, rather than just the physical attraction', and, 'I think it feels better having sex with a vagina, but the physical feeling and the attraction are different things, aren't they? Physically, it feels better with women, but I'm more psychologically attracted to men'. Similarly, Nate said, 'I've always known I was gay, I had gay thoughts when I was younger, I just didn't associate them with sexual feelings... I was always emotionally and romantically attracted to men', and Brandon said:

I'm mostly attracted to guys, but I have been with girls, I have had girlfriends. At first, I was more mentally than sexually stimulated—it was more dependent on personality than the person's sex—but it's more an attraction to guys now, and a few girls, so that's where I am.

Identifying as bisexual leaning gay, Jaspal said, 'It's very much about the individual, it's not just about looks for me', while Mike could imagine becoming less exclusively gay in the future 'because personality definitely makes someone more beautiful, so it shouldn't really matter if they're a boy or a girl, or something else'. For these participants, taking personality into account challenged the stability of essentialist categories (Rust, 1996).

Other participants understood their future sexuality differently based on who they could imagine themselves being in a long-term relationship with. For example, Richard said, 'The reason I crossed "bisexual leaning gay" is because, sometimes I will get drunk and be interested in girls, but I ticked "mostly gay" because that's more to do with boyfriends. I don't see myself with a girlfriend'. Similarly, Jaspal (see above) added:

You might meet someone and be attracted to them, straight away, then you get to know them, and you start to fall for them over the things they like, the things they say, that sort of stuff, and that really appeals to me, for either gender. I don't just look for one. From past experience, I would say the happiest I've ever been was with the last guy I was with... At the end of a bad day, he would smile or give me a cuddle, and I just got lost in it, then the day didn't seem so bad.

The emotional intensity of this relationship made Jaspal believe that his future sexuality would be more exclusively gay, adding, 'We had this crazy strong connection, we both felt so amazing the whole time we were together, and I just want that again. I haven't had that with a girl before, and I've been with quite a few'. Similarly, Peter said, 'Sexuality has always been a complicated thing for me, because I kind of delineate between physical attraction and

emotional attraction. I'm technically, physically, bisexual, but on a more emotional, spiritual, level, I don't think I could ever have another girlfriend'. Peter added, 'I went through the very typical thing, *thinking I was straight, thinking I was bi, then realising I was gay*, so I say that because I imagine the person I'll be with in the future will be a guy' (original emphasis). Alongside understanding how participants thought of their own sexualities in diverse and complicated ways, I highlight these narratives because of their relevance for conversations about emotional labour, creating a 'boyfriend experience', and interactions with the men who paid them for sex, which will be discussed in the next chapter (see 6.7).

5.3 Coming Out in Stages

As noted above, shifting social attitudes towards (homo)sexuality have considerably improved many young people's experiences of coming out as sexual minorities, even while discrimination may have persisted, or changed form, for others (Negy, 2014). The fluid ways in which many participants framed sexuality is also likely to be a feature of this changing cultural landscape, where rigid categories no longer seem appropriate for the range of behaviours and identities which have flourished over recent years (Riggle and Rostosky, 2011). These perspectives also influenced how participants recounted their 'coming out' experiences in terms of comfort and ease, as compared with older researcher (Flowers and Buston, 2001). For example, Elliott said, 'I'm very comfortable in my current understanding of myself... I haven't had any major issues in telling anyone', and Nate said, 'I'm glad it's like that now, very much so. I think it's going to bring about a new generation, which is completely free of [homophobia], and that's really exciting to see'. In line with research showing that sexual minority men are coming out at younger ages, 38 of the 50 participants first disclosed their gay, bisexual, or queer identities to friends and family while in secondary school, between the ages of eleven and sixteen (see Jones and Clarke, 2008). This section will describe when, where, and how participants came out, alongside the wider cultural context in which their narratives were formed.

Participants were strategic about how they came out (Orne, 2011), usually telling people who they thought would respond well first, or—if in a less accepting environment—waiting until they had left school to do so. For example, Sam said, 'I came out to close friends first, about ten of them in total, but I waited until sixth form to tell everyone. I grew more confident and thought it would be easier if they knew from the outset', Alfie said, 'I came out

properly at the start of sixth form, telling a few people who I knew would pass it along to others... All good responses, nothing negative. Looking back, I don't know what the big deal was', and Nate said, 'I came out to my closest friends aged eleven, then I had my first sexual experience with another boy when I was thirteen, then I came out to more people, the ones I thought would respond well'. Describing his secondary school as a 'very rough place', Nick said, 'I didn't come out until sixth form, that was the only time I felt comfortable, because I didn't want anyone knowing in my old school. When I did come out, they were all fine with it'. Waiting until university to come out, Chris said, 'I haven't told all of my old friends yet, even three years on... Not that I think my other friends wouldn't accept it, they would be fine, it's just that I don't want the relationships to change'. Elaborating on why he waited, Dan said, 'I always knew I was gay, but I didn't know any other gay people until I came to university, because it's a more free environment, I think'. Although these strategic decisions were based on a perception that some educational environments were more inclusive than others, few participants described experiencing homophobia directly.

Most participants described coming out at secondary school, sixth form, or university in very positive terms, with 31 of the 50 participants experiencing no homophobia after coming out. For example, Adrian said, 'They didn't seem to treat me any differently, I haven't had any problems with being gay at all', Dan said, 'Everyone was fine, it was not a problem for them', and Tom said, 'Everyone was cool. I haven't had any bad experiences'. Asked if he had encountered 'any hostile responses', Sam said, 'No, nothing at all', Matt said, 'I can honestly say that I haven't', and Mike said, 'My friends were great, no one cared'. Often, these positive experiences were associated with having other peers who were open about being sexual minorities. For example, Chris said, 'I came out to friends who I knew already had gay or bisexual people in their friendship circle, first...I felt more comfortable coming out to them', and George said, 'I came out in stages. The first person I came out to was in high school, and he already had gay friends'. Linking his positive experiences to 'our generation', Kevin said, 'I didn't lose a single friend over it. I think it's because we all grew up having gay friends and knowing gay people, so it was cool'. These narratives add further support to research showing that coming out has become more commonplace in environments where diversity and inclusion are encouraged and visible (Rivers, 2011).

Another feature of declining homophobic attitudes has been the formation of a 'post-closet culture', one which has become 'more accepting of out lesbians and gay men, seen the proliferation of LGBTQ media representation, and witnessed the attainment of a range of legal

rights for same-sex couples' (Dean, 2014, p. 1). In this post-closet or post-identity culture, Savin-Williams (2005) has further suggested that 'being labelled as gay or even being gay matters little' (p. 1). There was evidence to support this perspective among 16 participants, who distanced themselves from the concept of 'coming out' altogether. For example, Elliott said:

I didn't have a specific moment with my friends where I "came out" as such, I think they always suspected a little bit, because I'd always been very open about saying, "I'm not constricted by any specific sexuality", so I think they'd always known.

He added, 'We never had a specific conversation about it. Thinking about it, if they were the sort of person I *had to* come out to, they probably wouldn't have been my friends anyway' (original emphasis). Similarly, Ben said, 'I never really "came out", people just worked it out, based on the things you say, the things you do'. Not wanting to make his sexuality a big deal 'when getting to know someone', Mike said, 'I wouldn't tell people, it just comes up naturally in the flow of conversation, rather than telling them straight away'. Relating this perspective to his age cohort and 'future generations', Marcus said, 'We are experimenting more. We're less fixated on being one thing. With our parents, it was "straight" or "gay", that was it, but we are less judgemental and we are definitely more open to everything'. As Ghaziani (2014) notes, 'Those who consider themselves post-gay profess that their sexual orientation does not form the core of how they define themselves, and they prefer to hang out with their straight friends as much as with those who are gay' (p. 9). In line with my definition of 'postmodernism' (see 2.0), rather than being 'un-gay', being 'post-gay' is about viewing one's sexual identity in a less restricted way, no longer constrained by narrow identity politics based on a 'narrative of struggle' (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Ghaziani, 2014).

Culturally dominant *discourses of despair* were also present in the narratives of participants who believed that their positive coming out experiences were the result of 'luck' or 'fortune', rather than broader social change (see 8.3). For example, Kevin said, 'I'm blessed, because honestly, you hear some of these stories, people lose friends, get chucked out of the house, get bullied. I've never had any of that done to me', and Freddy said, 'I've been very lucky. I've never experienced anything personally vindictive, or anything against me... I would say I am more of an exception than the norm'. Asked why he believed this, Freddy added:

You see it online all the time, go on YouTube or anywhere, and you see people from less enlightened backgrounds. I've been very fortunate to grow up in an area where

everyone's very accepting, and I've got a great group of friends, but other people don't always have that, and receive bullying because they're different.

Similarly, Andy said, 'I never really faced any form of prejudice or judgement, nobody gave me a hard time for it, so I was very lucky in that respect', Sam said, 'For some reason, I've been lucky', and Mike said, 'I think I've just been very lucky'. One of the few participants to frame his experiences in relation to broader social issues, Dan said, 'I wasn't expecting the responses to be so good, because I feel like there are a lot of stigmatising stereotypes which still exist'. He added, 'Whether it's race, or religion, or sexuality, people have false beliefs about certain groups in society, and that kind of sticks in their mind'. Savin-Williams (2005) has suggested that the ubiquity of 'victimization narratives' contributes to a false or exaggerated perception of vulnerability among sexual minority young people. This aligns with the definition of 'discourse' I provided in Chapter Three (see 3.1), given that it makes positive coming out experiences seem unimaginable, which could explain why participants only understood their experiences through the notion of random luck. Dominant discourses of vulnerability and victimisation also shaped how participants understood sex work (see 7.6).

Digital spaces were often described as comfortable environments in which participants shared information about their sexuality, before disclosing to others, making them useful for different stages of coming out. For example, Freddy said:

The first person I came out to was via WhatsApp, just after we finished our GCSEs. She thought it was a joke at first, so we met in person to discuss it, and she was totally cool... Since then, it's mostly been in-person. At university, there's no need to text people, it's just, "Hi, I'm me".

Similarly, Jeremy said, 'To test the waters, to see how people would react, I posted a few Tweets on gay rights stuff, when I was fourteen... Everyone was fine when I did come out, two months later, they sort of suspected it', Luke said, 'I sent a Facebook chat to about 30 people who were real friends, not "Facebook friends", and let it filter out from there', and Dan said, 'I came out to a few friends first... on Facebook. Then I got Grindr and started meeting guys. I'm quite shy, so it took a while for me to get more comfortable with it'. These narratives highlight the close relationship 'between online and offline worlds' (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 7), which were not seen as entirely separate by the participants, alongside the positive role of the internet in sharing personal information with friends or 'testing the waters' before coming out (Gray, 2009; Morris, 2018).

Concerning family members, the internet also sometimes played an unintended role in their coming out processes. For example, Peter said, ‘My parents actually found out I was gay because my dad saw my Grindr account on my iPhone. He obviously knew what it was. He was fine with it, he just told me I had to tell my mother’. Nick said, ‘I came out when I was 16, and my parents just said, “We’ve known for years”. It was really easy coming out, because they’d already seen stuff on my computer, you know, they’d already found out that way’. Mentioning access to online pornography in positive terms (see McNair, 2013), Freddy said, ‘My mum found out by walking in on me watching porn! She said, “Freddy, we need to talk”, then went across the hall to get my dad... He said, “We love you unconditionally”, then went back to his office’. Highlighting intergenerational connectedness on social media platforms, Josh said:

In January, my parents asked me if I had something to tell them, but I had no idea what they meant. They said, “We’ve seen stuff you’ve been liking on your Facebook account, we just want to know what it’s about?” Very awkwardly, I said, “Okay”, and they said, “You know you can tell us anything” ...I must have followed Stonewall or some gay celebrity, so they asked.

Similarly, Dean said, ‘I didn’t have to come out to my mum, because she used the internet against me, by going on my Myspace page when I was sixteen. So, she already knew, but she’d always wanted a gay son’, and Tim said:

At thirteen, I wasn’t very good with computers, particularly things like cookies, browser history, temporary internet files, all the essentials which are now covered by Chrome’s incognito mode. That didn’t exist back in 2003, so my mother stumbled across these rather questionable browser histories.

He added, ‘After the browser history debacle, I decided it was safer to store everything on a flash-drive, which is a great idea unless you’re storing your GCSE coursework on the same flash-drive, which you take into school’. These narratives also highlighted the role of online pornography in exposing people to greater sexual diversity, and (in some cases) helping them to discover and disclose their desires (McNair, 2013). These narratives highlight the ever-present role of technology in the interpersonal relationships of the participants (Mowlabocus, 2010).

Family members were also generally accepting of their gay, bisexual, and queer relatives, with 27 participants describing positive responses from parents and siblings. For

example, Rhys said, ‘My parents were fine with it, they were literally like, “Yeah, fine, whatever”’, Matt said, ‘I didn’t really have any problems from my family’, and Peter said, ‘As I should have expected, no one had a problem. My mum said she had known for years’. Often, parents were as enthusiastically supportive as peers in embracing their sexual minority sons. Sam said, ‘When I told my mum and dad, they were really open, they couldn’t be any happier... The whole family were overjoyed. There were hugs, there were kisses, there was crying, it was really heart-warming, really nice at the time’. Tom said, ‘I’ve had boyfriends come home with me to meet the parents, because I have a big, close family. It was a great atmosphere to be in, growing up’. Similarly, Ben said:

My family knew I was gay from about the age of 12, I just denied it. Every now and then my mum would say, “I’ll love you all the same, I just want you to be happy. You have to accept it, then you’ll be happier”... It was a fantastic environment.

As with having other sexual minority peers, having relatives who were openly lesbian or gay was beneficial to some participants. For example, Ethan said, ‘I have a rather gay family anyway, so it was easy coming out to my parents when I was fourteen... There are several lesbians in my family, but I’m the only gay man’. Complicating a narrow narrative of ‘social progress’, however, coming out as gay, bisexual, and queer to friends and family was not always such an easy process, which I turn to in the following sections.

5.4 Religiosity, Respectability, and Rurality

Despite the positive coming out narratives of most participants, there were several intersecting demographic factors, including ethnicity, geography, religiosity, and sexual conservatism—in the form of *heteronormative* familial expectations—which had a negative influence (Konik and Stewart, 2004; see 5.6 for discussion of class intersectionality). For example, 14 of the 50 participants noted that the religious conservatism of their family and friends made it more difficult to be open about their sexualities. As Niall said, ‘My mum was very accepting, but my dad is a strict Irish Catholic, and I haven’t told him yet... I’d like to keep it out of my family, especially my dad’s side, because they’re Catholic’. Similarly, Freddy said:

I’m not going to tell my dad’s parents because when I say Nazi Catholics, I mean it. Condoms are a no-go, divorce is a no-go, abortion is a no-go. When I was younger, I thought I was a punishment sent by God to torture my grandparents.

Talking about his school experiences, Richard said, ‘Generally it was good, all of my friends were fine, but there were a few homophobes... They said I was a “freak of nature” and “against God”. It wasn’t a religious school or anything, but they were mostly Catholic’. Richard was one of just eight participants who received a negative response from school peers (see above).

Problems associated with religious conservatism were more common among the 12 participants whose ethnic identity was Asian, black, or mixed (see 4.4). Despite saying, ‘So far, it’s all been positive’, Brandon described one ‘rocky’ coming out experience with a school friend:

It was the way she phrased it, because she’s really religious, it seemed as if she was saying, “I still love you, but you’re choosing to sin”. That was the only experience I had that was anything close to judgement.

Furthermore, Brandon chose not to tell his family about his sexuality because, ‘My parents are fully African, they’re very religious, they very much believe, “Your soul will be destroyed if you’re gay”. I want to tell them, I will tell them, I just need to be strategic about it’. Also describing the sexual conservatism of his parents, Will said, ‘It’s not something that I fully expect them to know. My family is Catholic, my mum is very religious and conservative, she’s from Zimbabwe, where it’s punishable by death to not be straight’. Similarly, Kevin said, ‘I wouldn’t tell my grandma, she’s really Christian, we’re [of] Jamaican heritage. Some people you just don’t tell’. In each of these cases, evangelical, orthodox, or devout religious convictions were specifically linked to the ethnic backgrounds of the (less inclusive) individual family members.

Participants belonging to Middle Eastern or South Asian communities also described more instances of religiously located homophobia in their lives. Reporting negative responses from his peers as well, Amir said, ‘In my school there were people who were uncomfortable with it... Other Asian students in my year were quite nasty about it, they call you names, “gay”, “faggot”, things like that’. Asked why he thought this had happened, he added, ‘It’s their faith and their culture, I’m sure, given what they’ve been exposed to at home’. Similarly, Jaspal said, ‘I’ve got one or two friends who are very strict Muslims, and they say, “It’s cool to do whatever you want in your bedroom, so long as you know you’re going to hell”, which I think is hypocritical’. Talking about coming out to his family, he added:

They know, but they don’t fully accept it. The thing is, my dad’s family were all Sikh priests, so they’re very much focused on God. Even though Sikhism is very spiritual

and there are no laws against gays or anything, I was the first child of our generation to cut my hair, shave my beard, eat meat, drink alcohol, have sex before marriage, get a tattoo. My mum said, “You’re ticking every box off the list... As long as you’re not walking around parading it, because we wouldn’t find that acceptable as a family”.

Ash, also from a South Asian family, said, ‘Everyone has been fine, apart from my parents. My mum says, “I know I can’t be annoyed with you because in this country it’s normal”, but the rule is that I’m not allowed to see anybody’. However, he added, ‘It’s cultural. They’re not very religious’. Similarly, Paul said, ‘My family was split, with mum’s side being very happy about it, dad’s side less so. I think it was a clash of cultures. They grew up in Jordan, where there’s this kind of animosity towards it’. Experiencing very negative responses from his family after coming out, Mo said, ‘I was raised Muslim, spent a lot of time in mosques when I was younger, and we were told, “You’re not allowed be gay, you’re going to burn in hell, blah, blah, blah”... I internalised a lot of it’. He added, ‘After I came out, my mum sent this bitchy text saying, “This is too much, I don’t want to see you ever again. Don’t speak to anyone in your family”’. That was it’ (see 7.6 for further discussion of sexual stigma).

The hostility participants received for coming out as gay or bisexual was often explicitly related to heteronormative belief systems which supported traditional notions of marriage and reproduction. For example, Chris said:

My family background is Jewish, but it’s not about religion or God, it’s more about how other people will perceive it, and how you’ll get on in life, and I think there’s a fear of being persecuted, a fear of HIV, a fear of a number of things that they saw during their time...I guess coming from a Jewish background, having those values, it’s all about having a family and building a legacy.

Although his dad was ‘fine about it eventually’, Hari said, ‘He is very conservative. He believed that it would make my life more difficult, that I wouldn’t get married, have children, and all the rest of it’. As many of these narratives suggest, the heteronormativity of family members was not always strictly tied to religion, but was culturally influenced by religious expectations of propriety, respectability and reproduction (Rubin, 1984).

Illustrating this point, five participants explicitly referred to the HIV/AIDS epidemic as being a cultural force in shaping their parents’ perceptions of homosexuality as perverse (Malcolm et al., 1998). For example, Jeremy said, ‘My mum was a bit weird about it, but that’s just because of her upbringing, during the HIV/AIDS epidemic’. Talking about his dad, Peter

said, ‘At first, he was worried because his perception of the LGBT community is that we’re fundamentally more vulnerable to a lot of things than the “normal” straight community. He was worried about HIV and stuff like that’. Although his mother became more accepting, Tim said:

I think her impression of homosexuality was formed in the 1980s, with the YMCA, the AIDS crisis, that sort of thing, so there might have been a slight fear that I was going to run off and become a full-time prostitute and get AIDS and die or something.

Interestingly, Tim attributed the change in his mother’s perspective to him finding a long-term partner and adopting an ostensibly heteronormative lifestyle: ‘We can get married, have kids, you can sort of fit a homosexual relationship into the heterosexual mould, and it almost becomes respectable... I’m not pushing any boundaries, so my mother is happy’. Other participants from non-religious families also expressed frustration at parental pressures to conform to a heteronormative mould. For example, Adrian said, ‘My mum was quite upset because she had mentally planned this life for me, but I told her I could still have a husband and kids and all that, and that made her more comfortable with the idea’. Although he described his parents as ‘very open minded about it’, Greg said:

My mum is very keen on the idea of having grandchildren, having a daughter-in-law and that kind of thing... She has a very traditional idea of what a family should be, and the fact that she already has one gay son, for her, she’d like a normal straight son.

This heteronormativity was also a factor among some participants’ grandparents. Although his parents ‘were absolutely fine about it’, Elliott said, ‘It was different with my grandma, because she’s from a different generation, more traditional... She said, “I’m struggling to come to come to terms with it, I always imagined you having beautiful children”, so that was quite difficult’. Relatedly, Henry said, ‘I’ll never out myself to my grandparents, because they would ask, “What the hell does that mean?” They’re so old-school they wouldn’t be able to understand what it was... I wouldn’t want to disappoint them’. Such examples of heteronormativity were more common among parents and grandparents than peers, reflecting the relationship between age, religiosity, and attitudes towards homosexuality (Clements & Field, 2014).

Further illustrating that declining homophobia is an uneven social process, there was evidence of a divide between rural and urban areas in terms of their inclusivity (Swank, Fahs and Frost, 2013). For example, Jason said, ‘High school was horrible, because I’m from a small town, so there are no gay people around. There was a group of boys who bullied me. It started

off with just name-calling, but it was every single day'. Highlighting how his situation improved after moving to Birmingham, he added, 'Coming to university it has been completely different. There are more gay people, it's a lot more accepting, especially being in such a big city. It's completely different here'. After moving to London for university, Peter said, 'Now I live literally ten minutes up the road from where we're sitting, in Soho, and things got a lot better when I moved here from [a small town], which doesn't have much of a gay scene as you can imagine'. Similarly, Niall said, 'You couldn't just come out at my school. It's a small school in a remote village.... The thing I love about Manchester, moving from such a backwards town, is that it's not something people are hung up about'. He added, 'That's what I love about Manchester. There are so many cultures, and religions, and different groups, it's great'. Similarly, highlighting the association between rurality and discriminatory views, Matt said:

At home, there's a lot less gay people. Like, where I come from is inherently racist, they're not that comfortable with gay people either, they hate you if you're Polish, they hate you if you're gay, if you're black, disabled... Literally, this one guy, a work colleague of my dad's, said, "They should ship them all back, apart from one Indian and one Chinese to cook my takeaways". I was lost for words. On what planet is that ever an acceptable view to hold?

Rurality also appeared to influence the attitudes of some participants' parents. Describing his family, Elliott said, 'I mean they are from a traditional, fairly rural area, where people are not used to sexuality being anything other than heterosexual, and I think a lot of stereotypes still exist for them'. Similarly, Tom said, 'I was a little bit more nervous about telling my dad, I don't know why, maybe it's because in Wales there's this masculinity still'. Also growing up in the Welsh valleys, Alex said, 'I had to come out twice. When I was 15, I said, "Yeah, I'm bi", and then people at school were against me, so I said, "No, no, no, it was a social experiment" ...Parents weren't too pleased either'. Parodying the television series *Little Britain*, he added, 'Pardon the pun, but I really was "the only gay in the village", of my age, so I went on the internet to find others' (see Gray, 2009). These narratives support research showing that homophobia and heteronormativity retain greater policing power for young people in rural areas (Swank, Fahs, and Frost, 2013).

5.5 The Politics of Normativity

As illustrated by some of the narratives above, the homophobia experienced by a minority of participants was often closely related to a perceived ‘failure’ to meet heteronormative familial expectations. Furthermore, as Mo reflected, it was often difficult for participants to avoid ‘internalising’ these views, given repeated exposure to them as children and adolescents. One way this internalised heteronormativity was expressed was in how participants completed the sexual orientation forms, particularly among the 5 who circled ‘exclusively straight’ or ‘mostly straight’ as their ideal sexuality. *Homonormativity*, an associated concept, has also been used to describe ‘a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them’, centred around a neoliberal and ‘depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption’ (Duggan, 1992, p. 179). Following Duggan’s definition, the participants whose ideal sexuality did not match with their current sexuality tended to express frustration at the prospect of not having a ‘normal’ life which included aspects of ‘domesticity and consumption’ including marriage, children, home ownership, and other stereotypical tropes associated with the ‘heterosexual lifestyle’. For example, Sam said:

I do like the idea of having a wife, girlfriend, that kind of thing, and having my own children with somebody, but I don’t think it’s going to happen. I can’t really help that I like lads... I mean, my parents have told me, “You can’t help who you love”, and it’s true, but in an ideal world, I would like to be heterosexual... with kids, and a dog.

Asked why he could not have a homonormative version of this ideal, with ‘a husband, kids, and dog’, Sam added:

I’m not opposed to the idea of that. I guess, bad as it sounds, I want to fit in with the norm. I do like the way that I am, but there’s always that niggling little thing in the back of your mind that says, you know, having a wife would be the perfect picture. Trying to fit in with society, and the norm.

Returning to themes raised in the previous section, Sam attributed his desire for heteronormativity to being ‘closeted’ to the older members of his family: ‘I think it’s my grandparents, really, they’re the ones who really influenced me to be normal. It’s not like they said, “Be normal”, but it’s more for their benefit, because they don’t know yet’. Similarly, Elliott said:

I think it would be a much easier life if I was mostly straight, because I could have a satisfying emotional relationship with a woman, which would just be easier, you know, having children would be easier, my family accepting it would be easier, you could go out in public and not have to worry about being affectionate with each other.

Advocating a more homonormative perspective, Luke agreed that, 'It's probably easier to be straight, but I don't really want to be straight'. He added:

Marriage wasn't a big deal for me, but it's great that we have got that now. If it was in the media, like if I saw more gay couples in adverts, I think that's change and that's ground-breaking, that could make us feel more accepted within society.

Agreeing that life would be 'easier' if they were heterosexual, Jaspal said, 'My family are very much like, "You only get married once". You find a relationship and that's it, for life. You don't jump around, try things out... [something which] Grindr doesn't really cater for', and Simon said, 'I wish I had the straight lifestyle, because you have a wife and kids, it's the norm... Whereas, gays are shagging about until they're like fifty, then they never really settle down, or it's more dangerous or whatever'. Also asked why such a 'lifestyle' would not be possible in a relationship with another man, he added, 'You see films where it's like that, but then you go on Grindr and, nope, everyone is a slag'. Framing his Grindr use in terms of sexual 'norms', Alex also said:

There is a stigmatisation of people with topless profiles, who are either in the closet or whoreish... There's a few ways to use the app. One, you can use it to find someone you love, which involves uploading a *normal* profile picture with your face, but then if you just want to find someone to fuck, you usually show what your body looks like (emphasis added).

These narratives highlight the continued relevance of Rubin's 'charmed circle', where homosexuality was associated with promiscuity on the 'outer limits' of social respectability (see 3.4.2).

By contrast with these normative ideals, several participants were explicitly opposed to this narrative. Framing his queer identity as explicitly political, Rick said, 'I think the idea of getting rights from the state is fucked up, because the idea that the state has the power to give them in the first place is totally absurd, because they could just take them away'. He added:

Straight people tolerate gay people, but they could just as easily push us away, withdraw the tolerance, and the people that leaves behind—people of colour, trans people, migrants—it's really fucked up... The idea that we are a tolerant country, that other countries are backwards, and that this is somehow part of our British values, you know, that a nation state can be defined by its tolerance to sexual diversity....

Homonormativity, it's like saying, "Behave like straight people, act in a monogamous way, and you will be accepted"... I don't believe in conformism in any sense.

Similarly, critical of the homonormative 'veneer' of gay politics, Hari said, 'It's so veneery, do you know what I mean? It's the pretty half of the gay community. It's the *nice*, marriage equality, fathers with babies, that kind of shit' (original emphasis). He added:

There are some people in the gay community who get ignored. I also think the gay community, in public view, is desexualised. Gay people are like, "Oh, hey queen, hey girl", you know. Alan Carr, Graham Norton, gay men but without the sex. I don't have a problem with it, I love the camp, I just think sometimes the sex side of it is completely left out.

Asked what else was missing from representation, he added, 'Also, I think the gay community is a bit whitewashed, sometimes. Like, God, you don't see gay people of colour that often, you don't see people like me'. However, these critical perspectives on hetero/homonormativity were only expressed by a handful of participants, with most being apathetic about LGBTQ politics in general—usually because they had never encountered problems with being sexual minorities. For example, Connor said, 'I'm not the sort of person who has a chip on my shoulder about homosexuality. I'm not the sort of person who sees themselves as a minority... I've never been treated like a minority, never encountered any sort of discrimination', and Ethan said, 'Well, I have a rather gay family anyway, so it was quite easy coming out to my parents... People come out as straight in my family'. However, he did add, 'I'm into the whole social justice community, on websites like Tumblr, where everyone works to be politically correct—but not *too* politically correct' (original emphasis).

Another aspect of heteronormativity *and* homonormativity (as combined concepts) is the erasure of bisexual identities. Although 8 participants said that their ideal sexuality would be more bisexual than their current sexuality—because, as Tim said, 'It would be the best of both worlds'—this was rarely considered something desirable. One of the reasons that so few participants identified as bisexual may be due to its lack of cultural visibility, as compared

with either heterosexuality or homosexuality, in popular culture, political discourse, or academic research. The limited social and psychological research which does exist has further highlighted how bisexual people experience unique problems, distinct from other sexual minorities, including: double discrimination from both gay and straight identified people (Ochs, 1996); the erasure of bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity (King, 2004); and the idea that bisexuality is merely a transitional phase from straight to gay (Klein, 1993).

Each form of biphobia listed above was mentioned by at least one of the seven participants who currently identified as bisexual leaning gay. Describing the ‘double discrimination’ they experienced from both gay and straight peers, Greg said:

I had a lot of straight friends telling me, “You need to make up your mind, are you one or the other?” That sort of thing. Then a lot of my gay friends were saying, “You’re basically gay, why don’t you just come out? Stop hiding it”. It was quite upsetting.

Asked whether they thought of these responses as a direct form of hostility towards being bisexual, Greg added, ‘Not hostility, no, just a lot of quite patronising, condescending comments. Particularly from gay people... There was a tendency to want to put me in a box, and because they couldn’t do that with me, it frustrated them’. Similarly, although Brandon’s more ‘open minded’ friends embraced their bisexuality as ‘legitimate’, other peers were less understanding:

It’s more of an issue with people you’re trying to get to know, or people... who have this idea of what you’re *supposed* to be, so they’re like, “Oh, this is what you like”, or maybe people who knew you had a girlfriend before, and then suddenly you’re with a guy, and they think, “Are you choosing”? (original emphasis)

Brandon added, ‘With some of my friends, I just say, “I’m bisexual”, because it’s easier to explain, but with other friends I go more into detail, like, “I’m more attracted to men”, so they have more of an understanding of me’. The notion of bisexuality as a ‘transitional phase’ was also described by Jeremy, who said, ‘It actually makes telling people you’re gay easier’. Alongside Greg (who had a gay brother), Jason hid their bisexuality from family members because they thought it was ‘easier’ to identify as gay: ‘I’ve told my half-brother that I’ve been with a girl, but I’ve not told anybody else. I don’t think they would get it’. Relatedly, Niall said, ‘She’s a lovely person, but my mum was never taught that at school, so at first she didn’t really understand the term, the whole concept of bisexuality’. However, further highlighting the usefulness of the internet for educating people about sexual diversity, Niall added, ‘Then

she started looking up bisexuality online, and I think that taught her that there's this whole spectrum of sexualities'. While lack of support and understanding from family members was also mentioned by participants who identified as gay (see below), they did not experience the same forms of erasure as those who identified as bisexual (King, 2004; Klein, 1993; Ochs, 1996).

The narratives of Greg and Niall were especially interesting because they highlighted how identifying as gay was perceived as more acceptable, authentic, or understandable than identifying as bisexual (by some in their social networks). In Niall's case, being (incorrectly) labelled as gay was something which he resigned himself to:

At first, I was very much like, "I'm bisexual, you can't call me gay", but at this point, I don't care that much. I mean, it's bad I guess, for the LGBT community. If I'm in a relationship with a man and someone calls me "gay", I'm like, you know what, I don't care, it doesn't make much of a difference to me.

Awareness of bisexual erasure as a social problem was also shared by several of the participants who identified as gay, such as Elliott who said:

I think bisexual people are in a difficult position because they don't always feel accepted by heterosexual people, but equally, they don't feel accepted by homosexual people either. You know, often they might be told, "being bisexual is just a step on the way to being gay", because you've not come to terms with being gay or whatever, so I think people try to fit them into certain boxes which don't necessarily exist.

Part of the reason for this bisexual erasure, and perhaps contributing to fewer participants identifying as bisexual—despite believing that sexuality exists along a spectrum (see above)—may be because of the heteronormative/homonormative ideals described above. This speaks to the significance of queer theory for highlighting how the prominence of some identity labels can be limiting for others (Stychin, 1998), and the hierarchical stratification of sexual behaviours and identities more broadly (Rubin, 1984).

5.6 Symbolic Economies of Class, Gender, and Sexuality

Another dimension of the politics of sexuality described in the previous section is the role of class inequality. Following Duggan's (1992) definition of homonormativity, the ability to 'consume' or 'purchase' the appropriate form of gay lifestyle has also been central to

perceptions of progress and privilege within a broader economic context of neoliberalism. This has led to a cultural association between the ‘gay lifestyle’ and more middle-class sensibilities. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, social researchers have begun to expand on Bourdieu’s theory of the *symbolic economy*, introducing concepts such as *erotic capital* (Hakim, 2011), *gay capital* (Morris, 2018), and *gender capital* (Bridges, 2009), to make sense of how class intersects with other characteristics.

Turning first to gender, Bridges (2009) suggests that ‘gender capital – similar to both cultural capital and hegemonic masculinity – is in a state of continuous (though often subtle) transformation’ (p. 84). As cultural norms around gender and sexuality change, certain expressions of masculinity and femininity become more (or less) privileged in different social fields. This was expressed by several participants when describing their positive coming out experiences at school where, in addition to the random ‘luck’ they attributed this to (see 5.3), being more traditionally masculine was also thought to insulate them from homophobic abuse which they might have otherwise encountered. For example, Dean said, ‘I never had any negative experiences, never got bullied or anything like that, but I was bigger than most of the boys at school, so they couldn’t do or say much’. Asked if he had experienced any hostility from peers, Elliott said, ‘No, but that’s probably because I’m quite a *strong character* anyway. I don’t think I was an easy target, as such’ (emphasis added). Linking his ‘fortune’ to being able to blend in with the straight community, Peter said:

I almost feel like I’ve been treated *too* fairly, in comparison a lot of the people in our community, who have had so much more trouble than I have. I’m not sure if that’s a result of the fact that I’m not particularly effeminate or camp. I know people who couldn’t really blend into your usual crowd on Oxford street, but I feel like I could blend into the usual crowd, so I don’t get much trouble for it (original emphasis).

Similarly, describing the absence of homophobia in his life, Adrian said, ‘I wouldn’t really describe myself as flamboyant or feminine, I’m just myself, really. I don’t think many people would be able to know that I’m gay’, and Freddy said:

To an extent, the reason I haven’t received as much bullying or homophobia may be because I’ve played rugby all my life, I look more masculine, it’s the hetero-look. In a weird way, it’s normally the more femme guys who get the abuse... I don’t look that way. I think I am lucky in that sense as well.

Most of the narratives associating traditional (hegemonic) masculinity or ‘strength’ with positive coming out experiences were expressed by participants who described themselves as working-class (see 4.4). By contrast, with a Grindr profile description which read, ‘Master’s student, bisexual, just wanting something regular, *straight acting*’ (emphasis added) and a topless profile picture, Greg said, ‘That’s the photo I use the most, I think it shows all my assets... it’s quite suggestive as well’ (see below for how masculinity was displayed through photo-elicitation procedures during the interviews). In these examples, acting and looking ‘masculine’ was associated with being perceived as heterosexual, and thus normal (see 5.5). These narratives support research suggesting that sexual minority young people who are gender nonconforming may be more likely to experience bullying and discrimination (Meyer, 2015; Roberts, Rosario, Slopen, Calzo, and Austin, 2013), where being ‘straight acting’ acted as a shield against gender-based homophobic discrimination (Pascoe, 2007). This supports the notion that while overt homophobia has declined, more implicit forms of heterosexism and heteronormativity remain present (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014).

The concept of gay capital has also been used to understand how some (mostly middle-class) young men view their sexual minority identities as an asset in university settings where homophobia has decreased: ‘Rather than being ostracized or victimized due to their sexual minority status, the young men in this study were accepted and celebrated for being gay, sometimes interpreting their sexuality as a form of social privilege’ (Morris, 2018, p. 1199). Developing an intersectional analysis of class and masculinity which subverted assumptions about victimisation (see 8.3), this study also found that some (mostly working-class) students ‘held more rigid gender boundaries, and even some internalized homophobia’ (p. 1200). This class-based difference in gender politics was also apparent in some of the narratives above. Illustrating how class, gender, and gay capital can intersect, Nick said of his coming out experience, ‘A lot of people were actually really surprised... I had to start dressing a little bit gayer, because when I wear trackies and trainers, no one believes me, but when I dress like this, people do’—highlighting a form of (gay) cultural capital. Much as some participants associated being ‘more masculine’ with avoiding homophobia, Nick added, ‘I don’t give off a gay vibe. Unless I tell people, they don’t tend to know. So, I assume the people I surround myself with aren’t going to be homophobic. I’m more likely to get homophobia from someone completely random on the street who doesn’t know me, but because I don’t project it outwardly, I don’t get it’. Nick’s narrative highlights how forms of cultural capital can be coded as both ‘gay’ and ‘middle-class’, while associations between being ‘working-class’ and ‘more

masculine’ were expressed by a further 5 participants, including Alfie, who said, ‘Most of my friends are straight guys, I’m not a stereotypical gay’ (social capital), and Craig who said, ‘I’ve probably got a better reputation, even among some of my gay friends, for not being such a queeny gay’ (symbolic capital). By contrast, among the 26 participants who thought of themselves as middle-class, such associations were not generally drawn. For example, when discussing their Grindr profiles (see below), 14 of these participants included information about having high levels of educational capital such as ‘criminology student’, ‘law student’, ‘postgrad student’, ‘psychology graduate’, and ‘training to be a doctor’ (see 4.4).

Recently, Roberts (2018) has compared the concepts of gay capital and erotic capital, while critiquing some of their conceptual limitations. One difficulty remains in evidencing how possessing such forms of capital can be ‘converted’ into economic capital, in line with Bourdieu’s original formulation of the symbolic economy. Given that incidental sex work involves the direct exchange of money, this study may offer a tentative answer to this question (see 8.4). However, another research problem is how to accurately measure something as subjective as sexual desirability. Hakim (2011) has suggested that one appropriate method is self-assessment, which may be the best approach when considering cross-cultural or sub-cultural differences in attraction, courtship, and sexual norms. As I have argued previously, Hakim’s suggestion that ‘women generally have more erotic capital than men’ is based on a heterosexist assumption (p. 499), something which gay capital challenges ‘given that alternative sexual scripts and gender norms often exist in queer subcultures’ (Morris, 2018, pp. 1188-9). Indeed, based on the photo-elicitation procedures used during interviews, many of the participants in this study thought of themselves as having high levels of erotic capital, but not always in line with traditional gender capital (Bridges, 2009).

There were at least two factors suggesting that the participants in this study had high levels of erotic capital. Firstly, that they were offered money for sex is an indicator of erotic capital (see 6.2), and secondly, when discussing their profile photos on Grindr, Tinder, and other apps during the photo-elicitation procedures, over half of the participants described themselves as being ‘attractive’ or ‘good looking’ in some manner (also see 6.6 for discussion of webcamming as indicative of erotic capital). For example, Hari said, ‘It’s a very aesthetically pleasing photo’, Freddy said, ‘I thought I looked attractive in that picture... I looked good, and that’s the entire point’, and Scott said, ‘I often have a topless profile pic, like this one, which I think shows off how skinny I am, which tends to be quite popular’. Relatedly, Peter described his profile picture as being from ‘back in my modelling days’, and

Trevor said, ‘Oh, my photo is still under review. I chose it because I was being vain, and I thought it was quite a good picture. It’s another body picture, but a nicer one, I think’. Asked why he used topless photos, Trevor added, ‘I’ve always had body pictures, but I’ve become more confident in my body over the past six or seven months, guys have become more interested in me again, lately, so it’s boosted my self-esteem’. When asked if these photos had contributed to them being offered money for sex, most agreed that their self-presentation was a factor.

The body types participants framed as being attractive did not always conform with traditional definitions of gender capital (Bridges, 2009), where ‘femininity’ was often perceived as being a sexually sought-after trait. For example, another way in which participants framed themselves as having higher erotic capital was through adopting different labels, or as Gary called them ‘Grindr tribes’, such as ‘bear’, ‘cub’, ‘jock’, ‘otter’, and ‘twink’ (see Bonner-Thompson, 2017). Challenging associations between men’s erotic capital and hegemonic masculinity, the most common tribe participants placed themselves in was the category of ‘twink’. It should be noted, however, that this label is also associated with younger gay and bisexual men, a feature of the recruitment strategy for this study, and another characteristic associated with erotic capital more generally (Hakim, 2011). As Josh explained, ‘I’ve always put myself as a “twink” because I’m young, slim, not necessarily hairless, but smooth’. Being a ‘twink’ or ‘twinky’ in appearance was associated with being more sexually desirable to others. For example, Rick said, ‘Being younger, it’s something which got me a lot of attention. I like how my body looked, I fitted that twink look’, and Jacob said, ‘I think of a skinny, twinky type of guy as someone pretty on the eyes, with quite feminine features’. Elaborating on the association between certain ‘tribes’, gender, and sexual roles, Hari said:

My friend gets that, he’s a skinny, twinky guy, with black hair, and he’s very feminine looking. He doesn’t have much facial hair, and he wears a lot of make-up... Everyone just assumes he’s a bottom. Whereas my other friend is more muscular, he goes to the gym... and it’s assumed he’s a top. He’s got a beard, and he takes photos in the gym posing.

Relatedly, Alex said, ‘Just because I don’t have a T-shirt on isn’t anything saucy, it’s just convenience, I was lying in bed. I guess me without a T-shirt looks a lot better than me with a T-shirt’. He added, ‘Most people who reveal their chest are usually quite thin, or have abs,

which is quite sexy in most people's eyes. Then there are others whose bodies aren't great, so they have a blank profile'. Some participants also described themselves as being more attractive because they were 'muscular' or 'jocks', such as Scott who said, 'I know it's showing off, but I really liked that photo... Gym photos are pretty popular', and Elliott said, 'I've always been toned, and it definitely helps with attracting attention. That's also why I put "jock" there'. Similarly, Marcus said, 'I'd just been to the gym, so I had pulled the gym shirt down to cover some parts and show off others'. Despite also labelling himself as a 'jock' on his Grindr profile, Gary said, 'My profile says that I'm into "networking, friends, chat", obviously it says that I'm white, and I'm slim, and then it has a link to my Instagram'. On their Grindr profiles, a further 13 participants described their bodies as 'slim', 8 as 'toned', and 4 as 'muscular'. In the next section, I turn to ways in which erotic capital can be further complicated by issues of racism, fat-shaming, and other forms of discrimination.

5.7 Digital Inequalities

In recent months, Grindr has been critiqued by campaigners for its failure to address the ableism, racism, sexism, and other forms of sexual discrimination routinely encountered on the platform. Phrases such as, 'No fats, no fems, no blacks' are often posted on public-facing profiles, while those whose body shape, gender nonconformity, or skin colour is deemed undesirable may experience hostility in private chats. For example, Daroya (2017) has also drawn on the concept of erotic capital to highlight this problem. In response, Grindr released a series of YouTube videos to encourage users to be more inclusive, called 'Kindr'. Yet some features of the app, including its 'filters' (based on age, ethnicity, HIV status, etc.), continue to suggest that sexual discrimination is an acceptable part of this queer digital space. Many of the participants expressed their own frustrations with Grindr (and other dating and hook-up apps) concerning the social and sexual inequalities which they interpreted as part of using such apps.

The main form of discrimination encountered in queer digital spaces was racism, where participants were either harassed or ignored based on their ethnicity. Asked why he had not filled out all of the categories on his profile, Hari said:

Because I think they're fucking pointless. I don't see the point. Also, I hate the ethnicity one. I really don't think you need to know what ethnicity I am. Some people see the word "Asian" and tend to shy away. The number of messages I get has gone up massively since I took my ethnicity off here. There is racism on Grindr, of the

worst kind. I hate that shit. People put, “No fats, no fems, no Asians”, and I’m like, “*really queen?*” So, I took all that off, partly because I don’t think it’s anyone’s business. (original emphasis)

Also identifying as Asian British, Jaspal said:

I find myself being harassed by lots of younger bottom guys constantly, all the time, no matter where I go, I get asked, “Have you got a BBC [big black cock]?” I guess that’s a sign of the age, people are very open about what they’re looking for, they’re not shy to say they’re looking for sex.

Similarly, describing another user who propositioned him for sex, Ash said:

We had already decided that we would just chat, because I’m not his type. It’s weird though, because my “type” is also white people, and he only wants to go for white people as well. The only thing I didn’t get was why he didn’t reject me straight away, because my pic clearly shows that I’m not white... So, I was like, “Why do you still seem interested?” and he was like, “Oh, you had a good body, and I wanted to see if that could compensate for the fact that you’re not white”.

Asked if he encountered racist views online regularly, Ash added, ‘Yeah, very often... It sounds bad, but I always put my dick pic before my face pic, because when I put my dick pic they get “black”, whereas if I put my face pic they realise I’m Asian’. He added, ‘Black is better. Even if they don’t think I’m black, it’s adequate [penis size], so it’s fine... I feel more comfortable naked. Sometimes, I look in the mirror and get dizzy at how bad I think I look, facially’. It is difficult not to associate Ash’s dysphoria about his Asian ethnicity with the comments he routinely receives on apps such as Grindr and Kik, including that his race is something to be ‘compensated for’. In Chapter Seven, I explore how such experiences of racism in sexual encounters also influenced incidental sex work (see 7.4).

Alongside age and race, another dimension of erotic capital was related to body shape and size, including traits associated with hegemonic masculinity such as muscularity (Logan, 2014). Several participants highlighted how their bodies did not conform to hegemonic ideals because they were either ‘too skinny’ or ‘too fat’, such as Amir who said, ‘I’m not that self-confident with my body, so I wouldn’t put a topless pic up’, and Kevin, whose profile description said, ‘Not got a six-pack, but I don’t mind’. Having lost a significant amount of

weight over the past two years, Ryan reflected on how other users treated him differently as a result:

I chose that picture because, basically, I used to be twenty stone, but in this I look pretty trim, so I'm quite proud of that. I'll show you a picture of me before. Losing a lot of weight, it's been interesting to see how people change... people want to talk to you more, it's very superficial, quite shallow, but you get a different type of audience as well.

Asked if they thought this profile picture had influenced someone to proposition them with money, Ryan added:

No, because I sent them loads of other pictures privately... I'm proud of my body. I remember how I looked before, I hated it, I couldn't even take a selfie. Now I'm taking lots of photos, and sharing them. I don't have the best body, but what is the "best" body? Some guys like how I look, some guys think it's amazing... I hate body-shaming as well, whether you're skinny, whether you're fat, whether you're tall or short, whether you've got a small dick or a big dick, a round ass or a square one, you should cherish what you've got, and that's something I've always tried to do.

Ryan was also aware that much of the desire for his body before losing weight was motivated by fetishization:

I mean, I was still getting a lot of attention back then, it was just a different sort of attention. Chubby-chasers, guys who are into that... I remember I felt quite upset and angry, because I'd worked so hard, I'd lost this weight, then this guy wanted me to be fatter. But there's been a few guys I've been really attracted to, who wanted me to be bigger. Then there's been different guys, since I've lost weight, a different audience.

Relatedly, Blake's profile description read, 'Chunky yet funky', and they wore a dark T-shirt in their profile picture 'because black is very slimming'. Blake suggested that their larger body size was not necessarily a barrier to hooking up online because, 'The chubby market is looking up... I swear some of these guys are encouraging me to get fatter, so I can enter a niche market'. As with ethnicity, in Blake and Ryan's narratives, their larger body size was framed as a fetishized desire.

5.8 Queer Definitions of Sex

The question of ‘what counts’ as sex is one of cultural, political, and legal significance. As Bainham and Brooks-Gordon (2004) have commented on the Sexual Offences Act, 2003:

That which is ‘sexual’ is defined in section 78 to be essentially what a ‘reasonable person’ would consider to be sexual. The provision is just one of many in the Act which presuppose the existence of a ‘normal view’ of sex and sexual activity, to which the majority of us subscribe... So much is clear from the Home Secretary’s Foreword to the White Paper in which he refers to ‘our common values’ which ‘can be undermined by the behaviour of a minority’ (p. 261).

Before turning to narratives of incidental sex work in Chapters Six and Seven, it is useful to explore how the participants understood the terms ‘sex’ and ‘sexual’, and how this was distinct from a heteronormative definition of penetrative or reproductive sex.

Most participants had an inclusive definition of the word ‘sex’, which included non-penetrative sexual encounters, including oral sex, mutual masturbation, and other forms of sexual touch (irrespective of a partner’s gender). For example, Ryan said, ‘Sex is not always about penetration of genitals. So, it’s not just in the vagina or in the anus. To me, sex is about orgasm, I would define sex as having an orgasm’, and Dan said, ‘It doesn’t have to be penetrative. It can just be kissing, then sucking, and it *can be* penetrative, but most sex ends in orgasm—that’s probably how I’d define it, an intimate process between two individuals, resulting in orgasm’ (emphasis added). Similarly, Rhys said, ‘Any activity which feels good, and it feels good between—I don’t want to say two people, because it’s not always—two or more people and it feels good, basically’. He added, ‘To be honest, I wouldn’t rule anything out because I’m open minded. Everything really’. Others ruled out kissing, such as Nick who said, ‘Sex is any act that involves the cock or ass, really. Kissing isn’t, snogging isn’t, but anything that gets... properly intimate. Touching or mutual masturbation can be a form of it, but not properly’, and Freddy who said, ‘I would say kissing is not sex, but anything in the genitalia region, all that stuff’. Given that they tended to avoid anal sex in general, Alfie said:

For me, it’s all activities which have something sexual about [them]. I don’t really use the term “sex”, I normally call it “playing with somebody”. It might be different as I don’t really do penetration, which is what most people think of as sex.

Similarly, Adrian said, ‘I don’t really do anal sex. I don’t really find it attractive. I do it sometimes, just to please the other person, but I have other things that I like, a few fetishes, a

few kinky things' (see 6.5 for further discussion of 'kinky' sex). Others included mutual masturbation in their definition of sex, including Amir who said, 'Sex is anything from mutual masturbation upwards', and Niall who said, 'I think blowjobs do count, and anal. I mean, yeah, any penetration counts, and then I would also say fingering or whatever counts'. Highlighting the difficulty in clearly defining what counts, Robin said, 'It doesn't have to be penetrative sex, it can be oral sex, wanking someone off, when it's more than a kiss, and then there's that funny line in-between', and Jason said, 'Anything where you interact with people sexually', and Sam said, 'It's on a spectrum from full sex, to oral sex, to other stuff'. Highlighting how such broad definitions of sex challenged heteronormative assumptions, Brandon said:

I've heard straight girls say, "I've not had actual penetration yet", or "I've not had my actual vagina penetrated yet", so, you know, "I've had anal sex, but not sex, so it doesn't count"—but you've just described it as anal *sex* (original emphasis).

Given that most of the participants embraced a more open-ended, boundary blurring, or 'queer' definition of sex—as distinct from more restrictive or heteronormative expectations of penetrative intercourse associated with marriage, monogamy, and reproduction (Rubin, 1984)—this is how I use the term throughout this thesis. A queer definition of sex may or may not include penetrative anal sex, oral sex, masturbation, and other forms of sexual touching such as BDSM or kink (see 6.5). While participants did not include kissing or cuddling in this definition, they did describe the significance of such behaviours for building emotional connectivity, which was viewed as enhancing sexual experiences (see 6.7).

By contrast with these more inclusive responses, twelve participants said that only oral and anal sex counted as 'sex', such as Peter who said, 'Anything we would consider sex is above second base. Oral and up, I suppose. I can never remember the "bases", but anything more than what would be considered traditional sexual contact'. He added, 'There's an awful lot of sexual contact that happens between guys that doesn't involve penetration, just because it's a more difficult act'. Others distinguished between 'sex' and 'sexual acts'. For example, Alex said, 'I mean, technically, when it comes to giving a hand job, that's a sexual act, but it's not sex'. Only six participants held a narrow definition of sex which only included penetrative (anal or vaginal) sex. For example, Mo said, 'It doesn't count unless you've penetrated them', George said, 'Less than a blowjob is not sex', and Will said, 'If I said, "I had sex", I would mean penetrative sex. If I hadn't had penetrative sex with someone, I

wouldn't say I had "sex". Similarly, Ethan said, 'If I think about all the people I've had sex with, I think about people that I've had penetrative anal sex with'. Arguing that 'people's views of sex have changed', more generally, Scott said:

As I was saying, I think the way people talk about it, now, people are just more up-front about it, if they have pulled, what they have done. Whereas, I think a few years ago, you might say, "Oh, yeah I had sex last night", but you wouldn't go into detail about what it was, what you did together... I suppose, in a sense, having less than penetrative sex is where the word "fun" derives from.

He added, 'I think a lot of people see having "full sex" as [something] that comes up with a lot more attachments, emotionally, whereas a quick bit of foreplay or whatever doesn't have to'. Several participants also put emphasis on distinguishing between forms of sex based on the level of emotional connection there was between them and their sexual partners (see 6.7). For example, Ben said, 'I'm split, in a sense. Again, I said I'm no angel, I have a lot of sex... But I think sex can just be *a thing*, with no feeling, and I've certainly had encounters like that, where it's been a hook-up or a friend who you get with occasionally' (original emphasis). He added, 'At the same time, when I've been in relationships, it's a completely different experience... At the end of the day, I know there's not a difference, but I make it a difference, if that makes sense?' Similarly, Jacob said, 'You've got sex where you love, you know, it's proper, it's intimate, and then you've got random one-night tumbles when needs come along', Marcus said, 'It's getting to know someone on another level, on an intimate level... We are animals, at the end of the day, but it's also getting to understand another person... on another level, emotionally, mentally, and physically', and Nate said, 'I think sex is kind of a mixture between a physical feeling and an emotion, and a kind of force that everyone feels. I think it's a mixture between instinct and emotion'. He added, 'I think a separation between those can occur, but that's when things get more troublesome'. By contrast, Andy said, 'For me, sex is purely physical. I don't really have much of an emotional connection with sex. It's something that I do to make me feel good, or to make somebody else feel good' (see 6.7 for further discussion of the relationship between emotions and sex).

Although most could not remember precisely how many, using their own definitions of these terms, the 50 participants estimated having had well over 3,000 different sexual partners, collectively. Only thirteen participants (all of whom had had fewer than 30 sexual partners) could remember precise numbers, such as Niall (4), Marcus (6), Tom (7), Kevin (7),

Will (10), Nate (13), Josh (15), Luke (15), Alex (19), Rhys (22), Greg (25), Jacob (27), and Richard (29), as compared with sixteen who estimated over 50, five who estimated over 100, and three who estimated over 200 different sexual partners. Compared with heterosexuals or previous generations, the number of sexual partners described by participants may appear high (see Bogle, 2008), lending support to Attwood and Smith's (2013) conceptualisation of leisure sex as forming part of a more liberalised sexual culture and economy of experimentation (see 7.3). In the following chapters, I explore how being paid for sex was experienced by participants, including the role of erotic capital, emotional labour, and other themes which emerged in this chapter.

Chapter Six:

Exploring Incidental Sex Work Encounters

6.1 Erotic, Emotional, and Economic Exchanges

In the previous chapter, I introduced the 50 interview participants by exploring their sexual identities, coming out narratives, experiences of inequality, and definitions of the term ‘sex’. In this chapter, I turn to the incidental sex work encounters which they agreed to engage in, the primary reason for their participation in this study. First, I will explore how the encounters were arranged in queer digital spaces such as Grindr (alongside other dating or hook-up apps/sites), and general-purpose platforms such as Craigslist, Facebook, and Whatsapp. Second, I will describe the 125 older men who paid participants for sex, including their perceived class, ethnicity, and other characteristics. Third, I will outline the different forms of sex participants were paid to perform with these ‘clients’, including both ‘vanilla’ and ‘kinky’ sexual acts, alongside paid webcam shows performed by 10 of the participants. Finally, I will explore aspects of emotional labour in the encounters, before suggesting that for most of the young men I interviewed, differences between their paid and unpaid sexual experiences were relatively minor, if considered ‘different’ at all. These results raise important questions concerning the exchange of erotic capital and economic capital, which will be returned to in Chapter Eight (see 8.4).

6.2 Arranging to Meet Online

The social media platform used most commonly to arrange incidental sex work encounters was Grindr, as described by 43 of the 50 participants (35 used this app exclusively). This may reflect that the sample was recruited mainly through Grindr (see 4.2). Nonetheless, this location-based dating and hook-up app for sexual minority men was described as playing a central role in the organisation of incidental sex work encounters. For example, Mike said, ‘Without Grindr, I would never really have been in a situation to have been paid for it’, and Elliott said, ‘After the first time, it was always through Grindr, they approached me to ask if I wanted, “Money for fun”, or whatever’. Elaborating on his online interactions, Niall said:

The first message from him was about a paragraph long, on Grindr, saying, “Hey, would you be interested in doing this, for this amount? I’m looking for someone who’s never done this before. I think you’re very attractive”, all this stuff, and it was just so straight-to-the-point. I showed an interest, and asked him if he had any kinks, or anything like that, and he said, “No”, he just wanted someone who’s never done it, been paid for it, before.

Several participants emphasised that they were approached ‘directly’ and did not lead the conversations. For example, Peter said, ‘He messaged me, completely out of the blue, on Grindr, “I will pay you £250”. I had never met him before, I didn’t know him, I didn’t recognise him’, and Ryan said:

Well, he messaged me, he made the proposition, the *indecent proposal*... I never, ever asked him for money, he would always message me and say, “Oh, I’m feeling really generous right now, so do you want to do this or that?” (Original emphasis)

Similarly, Blake said, ‘I never ask, I am always asked’, and Paul said, ‘He approached me first, on Grindr. I think his initial message was, “Looking to pay”, and it went from there’.

Asked to describe their online conversations, participants suggested that a range of approaches were adopted by the men offering them money. Some of these were very ‘direct’ (as above), while others were more ‘discreet’. Commenting on a direct approach, Dean said:

It happened earlier this year, January. I think it was someone through Grindr, or it could have been Squirt... He messaged me first, saying, straight away, “Do you want to have sex?” I think I may have asked for pictures, because I don’t think he had them on his profile. So, he sent me a few, and then I said, “Yeah”, and it was arranged, I think it was done quite quickly really.

Asked how the conversation proceeded, he added, ‘There wasn’t much discussion really. I asked if he had any fetishes, that sort of thing, but he just wanted a normal, casual, sex experience... It was all very straightforward, he wasn’t playing games, which was nice’. Expanding on the tone of their online conversation, Dan said it was, ‘Very unemotional. It was, basically, “Do you want to meet? I’ll pay you if you’re fit”, exchanging photos, “Right, I’ll be there in ten minutes”. That was literally it. Did what we had planned, then I took the money’. These ‘unemotional’ exchanges may have contributed further to feelings of emotional distance as described by several participants later in this chapter (see 6.7).

By comparison, some participants noted that the men who messaged them adopted an indirect or suggestive approach. For example, Tim said:

I think it was on Grindr, a gentleman messaged me. I don't think the initial conversation was deliberately sexual. As in, we were just chatting about something inane. Then he mentioned that, rather than going out to clubs to buy guys drinks—where, you know, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't work—he'd rather cut to the chase and pay guys for it on here.

Relatedly, Richard said, 'In the conversation, he started by saying, "Hello"—this was on Grindr, by the way—and I said, "Hey, how are you?", just a normal chat until he asked, "Do you want to get paid?" and sent a pic', and Jaspal said, 'They always try to make it sound like it's not money-for-sex, like, "Want to come over? We'll just hang out. Oh, and I'll give you some cash for it", you know'. Whether approached in a direct or indirect manner, the first step in initiating incidental sex work encounters occurred with another user making an offer to the participant.

In several examples, it was only after the participants declined an offer of (unpaid) sex that the men messaging them offered money. For example, Charlie said, 'This guy messaged me on Grindr, and I wasn't really attracted to him, so I said, 'Not that interested, sorry mate'', but then he offered to pay', Freddy said, 'At first I said, "No, I'm not that interested", but when I went back on later, he had sent a message saying, "I'll pay for it", and I said, "Really?"' and Andy said, 'There was another guy, on the same app, Grindr, who had contacted me before, asking to hook-up for sex, and I'd initially said, "No". He then came back and was offering me money'. Similarly, Nick said:

The first guy contacted me on Grindr, he started a normal conversation, then he basically asked, "Would you like to have sex with me?" and I said, "I'm afraid not", and he said, "Just hear me out, I'm willing to pay for you to suck me".

He added:

The second guy was on Grindr, again. We chatted for a little while, then the question of sex came up, and I said, "No man, sorry, you're not my type", and he said, "Well, what if I give you £80?" That's pretty much how it all went. There was one guy who came up with it straight from the off, saying, "I'm looking to reward guys for being

spanked”, and you could tell he was making use of the saved message feature on Grindr, copy paste, copy paste, copy paste, to everyone.

The ‘Saved Phrases’ feature described by Nick allows for a ‘premium user’ (who pays a monthly subscription) to conveniently copy and paste identical messages in conversations with multiple users. Other features of Grindr helped to facilitate incidental sex work encounters, including ‘Send Location’ and ‘Send Photo’. Explaining how the former made arranging the encounters easier, Jeremy said, ‘It was just a case of sending him my location, and he drove down’, and Richard said, ‘This guy messaged me on Grindr, I sent him my pics and location, he picked me up in his car, we drove around for a bit, then he sucked me off’.

Given that Grindr is a highly visual platform, including the ‘grid’ of public profile photos on display (Bonner-Thompson, 2017), sharing photos privately was also an important aspect of arranging the encounters. For example, Daniel said, ‘He messaged me on Grindr, looking for sex, and said he would pay. At first, I was like, “No, that’s rude”, but then he showed me his pictures and we agreed the price’. While Mark said, ‘It was just a normal Grindr chat until he sent me his body pic, and I said, “OK, that’s hot, I want you”, then he said, “Do you want to get paid?” So, I did it’. Most participants suggested that they needed to see photos of the men before agreeing to meet them, which could be viewed as a form of ‘vetting’ or ‘screening’, something which Sanders et al. (2017) show as routine practice among online sex workers. Greg said, ‘Obviously, you have to do a bit of sussing out, and I knew I had to be comfortable with it... So, we spoke on the phone beforehand, chatted, exchanged pictures, and then we met’, and using language indicative of sexual commodification on such platforms, Josh said:

If someone asks me for that, I always ask if they’ve got pictures, because if you’re offering me something, I want to see what you’re offering. I want to see the goods, before I buy.

Another aspect of this digital screening depended on how recently the photos were perceived to have been taken. For example, Andy said, ‘I always ask for a few of their face, and their body. Hopefully recent ones, but I’ll try and use my own judgement as to how recent they might be. Often, I’ll ask for more explicit photos as well’. Rather than expressing any safety concerns, these screening measures were framed as determining the age and attractiveness of the men propositioning them for sex.

Participants compared arranging the incidental sex work encounters with their use of Grindr more generally. For example, Marcus said, ‘I enjoyed talking to him. I always like talking to people, on this app... we were talking over the course of a good four or five hours, from the morning until 5 o’clock, when I met him’. Adding that he would ‘never go to someone’s house’ without communicating ‘for a while first’, Marcus characterised this online interaction as ‘normal’ for him. Similarly, expanding on how the conversation unfolded, Luke said, ‘I think it was one of those days, where you’re bored, and you chat to people, like I said, you’re not *that* interested, you’re just killing time. Then, I think it got onto the topic of sex’ (Original emphasis), and Matt said, ‘For me, it’s if I want sex. Say... I’m feeling a bit horny, I’ll pop on Grindr and see what’s available’. Elaborating on how he used the app ‘normally’, Freddy said:

Whenever I go to a busy place, I always go on Grindr, just to see what it’s about. Not necessarily to meet up with someone, because in my area the nearest person is three miles away. I’m always interested to see who’s less than 1000 feet away, and you actually get people my age, which is so much nicer. That was when he messaged me.

It was a blank profile, and it was a long message saying, “looking for a person to...”

Describing how the offer was for unpaid sex initially (see above), Freddy added that, after the offer of money was made, ‘I think he thought I was shocked and offended, because he put, “No, no, no, sorry that was a stupid idea”, at which point, I didn’t reply... I messaged him later saying, “OK, I’d probably be up for that”’. Similarly, Harry said, ‘If it gets to 10 or 11 o’clock at night and I’m feeling horny, I’ll pop on Grindr to see who’s available... That was how I met the guy who ended up paying me’, and Andy said:

Most of my interactions on Grindr are when I’m horny and I’m just looking for sex, and so they’re very brief, they’re very blunt and straight to the point. So it will quite commonly be a brief introduction, like “Hi, how are you?”

These narratives also highlight how incidental sex work was often arranged in an opportunistic manner, which shaped how participants later described their motivations for agreeing to sell sex (see 7.2 and 7.3).

Alongside Grindr, several other social networking sites and apps were used to arrange incidental sex work encounters, including Fitlads, Hornet, Ladslads, Manhunt, Recon, Scruff, Squirr, and Tinder. For example, Jason said, ‘I only got Grindr recently, so this all happened on a website called Fitlads. He had messaged me before, but I wasn’t interested. Then that

night he messaged me again and offered to pay, so I said yeah’, and Mo said, ‘I was on Fitlads, got a message, but I said “I’m not really looking for anything”, then he said, “Oh, that’s a shame... I have £500 burning a hole in my pocket, and I just want some company”’. Describing how he met the six men who paid him, Ryan said:

Half of them were through Grindr, about three of them. I think the second one liked the look of my Tinder profile, and asked if I wanted to make some cash... Then there’s this Asian guy, he must have messaged me on Scruff and seen my private pictures, because he made reference to my downstairs area, and he messaged me saying, “I’ll give you £50 if I can suck you off” and I said “OK” ...The most recent one was through Squirt, if you’ve heard of it?

On the first (of many) incidental sex work encounters, Elliott said, ‘It was on a site, one of the most common ones, it might have been Ladslads, or Fitlads’. He added, ‘The first time was on that website, but I’ve gone off those dating websites, so it was always on Grindr after that’. Relatedly, Gary said, ‘I met the first one on Grindr, and the second one on Squirt. We were speaking on there, then exchanged numbers’, and Simon said, ‘The first one was on Grindr, then the second one was on Hornet. They both propositioned me’. Asked to elaborate on the conversations, he added, ‘They’re all discreet profiles, they just popped up and basically said something like, “Fun for cash?” or whatever, and I was just laughing at them, not taking it seriously, but then I thought about it more’. Describing how he used sites differently from apps, Brandon said:

Because Fitlads and Manhunt, it’s not like Grindr, so I had a more provocative picture up, it was very sexual and, at the time, it was almost like I craved the attention, because I had a really good body at the time, so I was like, “Look at me, yasss”. Then you start getting messages, you ignore a few messages, and then there’s more messages coming up, like, “I will pay you”, and some of them message you again and again.

Additionally, a number of general-purpose social media platforms were mentioned by participants including Craigslist, Gumtree, Facebook, and Whatsapp. For example, Ali said, ‘I met two guys on Grindr, but the first time I was offered money for sex was when Gumtree had a “casual encounters” section’, and Amal said, ‘All my meets were on Craigslist. I wasn’t looking for people to pay me, but guys would respond to my posts offering cash, so I thought, “Why not?”’. Similarly, Tim said, ‘He was chatting to me on Grindr for a while, just casual

conversation without the premise of being paid, then I added him on Facebook and we arranged to meet at his place', and Adrian said, 'He was chatting to me for quite a while, on Grindr. Then I added him on Facebook, and we met at his place, because he had his own flat'. Asked to elaborate on the online conversations, he added, 'It was quite a casual conversation, beforehand. We didn't really start chatting on the premise of being paid'.

Sometimes the conversations migrated onto other forms of electronic communication, such as email or text message. For example, Ethan said, 'So, a guy approached me on Grindr, asked if I had ever been paid for sex... He said it would be easier to arrange through emails, because he gets notifications on his phone, whereas he didn't check Grindr much'. Relatedly, Sam said, 'We were talking for quite a while, actually, about meeting... It must have been about two months, on Grindr initially, then we swapped numbers because we thought texting would be easier', and George said, 'He asked for my number, then a couple of weeks later I got a text saying, "Do you want to go for drinks?"' In most cases, exchanging numbers to 'text' referred to communicating on Whatsapp, an app which allows users to share text, images, and videos through mobile data. For example, Trevor said, 'Originally, we started speaking on Grindr, and then it moved onto Whatsapp'.

Receiving unsolicited offers of money for sex was unsurprising to most of the participants because it was something which occurred routinely in their experiences of using social networking sites and apps. As Alfie described his incidental sex work experience:

It was only a few months ago, and just the once. There was this guy, on Grindr, who was offering me money to suck him off. It wasn't the first offer I'd had before, but it was the first time the offer had happened when I could accommodate and fit it in with my schedule. I blocked him afterwards because I didn't really want a follow-up performance.

Suggesting why he tended to ignore these offers, Jason said, 'I've been asked numerous times on Grindr, but I've just disregarded it or blocked them, if they were persistent. It can get annoying'. Also commenting on his reasons for refusing some incidental sex work proposals, Paul said:

So, I was on Grindr and kind of thought, *maybe*. I remember this guy, a horrible, horrible guy, who offered me money, and I almost went through with it, but I couldn't. Then I thought, "OK, if it's with the right guy, I would kind of like to do it".

So, I put it on the back-burner, until this guy messaged who I was more interested in.
(Original emphasis)

Similarly, Connor said, ‘That always happens on Grindr, people offering, I don’t know why they can’t get it for free’, and Niall said, ‘I mean, it happens a lot, people messaging me on Grindr saying, “I’ll give you £50 for this, or £20 for that”, but this guy offered me significantly more’. After Brandon changed his profile picture to a topless photo, he said, ‘Then the offers started coming in—because you normally get offers, anyway, on Grindr and things, they want to give you cash or whatever—and I was like, “Cool”. I normally don’t pay it any attention, I just block’. Describing those offers he turned down, Mike said, ‘Yeah, I’ve had one or two, not many. Again, one was an older guy who I didn’t find attractive, and who wanted to have penetrative sex, and I was like, “Nah”’. For these participants, the amount of money offered, sex acts requested, and their availability to meet the men offering them money were factors in deciding whether to respond or not. That they received such offers on a relatively routine basis, as indicated by the quotes above, may provide further evidence of these participants having (above average) erotic capital in queer digital spaces (see 8.4).

6.3 The Clients

Given that this study focused exclusively on interviewing young men who were offered and accepted money for sex online, the only information (currently) available about the men who propositioned and paid them—hereafter referred to as the ‘clients’—also comes from their narratives. As such, the results presented in this section, about the clients of incidental sex work, are somewhat speculative. Nonetheless, several themes emerged from the interviews, such as the perceived ages, ethnicities, and other characteristics of the clients. For example, all of the clients were thought to be older than the participants, with estimated ages ranging from 19 to 69. The youngest was Alex’s first client who ‘was actually a very similar age to me, about 19’, while the oldest was Blake’s second client who was ‘approaching 70, we had a conversation about his upcoming birthday’. With 125 clients described by the 50 participants, 15 were in their late teens or twenties, 44 were in their thirties, 37 were in their forties, 18 were in their fifties, and 11 were in their sixties. Highlighting how the ages of their clients could not be known for certain, Niall said, ‘He said he was 32, but I would say closer to 36’, and George, ‘Technically, I never knew how old he was, or even his last name’.

Concerning ethnicity, 106 of the clients were believed to be ‘white British’, four ‘Asian’, four ‘Middle Eastern’, one ‘half-white, half-Arab’, and one ‘black British’. Alongside white ‘Australian’ and ‘Belgian’, and ‘South African’ clients, other nationalities mentioned included ‘Indian’, ‘Iranian’, and ‘Italian’. Illustrating that the perceived ethnicities of the clients was based on a degree of guesswork, Will said, ‘He was definitely non-white, but I don’t know if he was mixed, black and white, or Romani, or something else’, Robin said, ‘I think he was Middle Eastern, Arabic, Jewish, but sort of white-passing’, and Luke said, ‘I think he was Brazilian, or maybe from Chile, somewhere in South America’. Relatedly, Jaspal said, ‘There was a bit of a language barrier. He wasn’t English, whatever he was, so it was quite difficult’. These perceptions of ethnicity were based on a combination of the respective client’s accent, skin colour, and what they said, either online or in person. While 33 of the 38 participants who identified as white were paid for sex exclusively by other white men, 7 of the 12 participants who identified as Asian, black, or mixed were paid for sex by other men of colour (see 7.4 for further discussion of racism expressed by some clients).

The personal characteristics which participants focused most attention on were age and attractiveness, with age differences ranging between one and fifty years. The older age of most clients was highlighted as a primary reason that they believed these men ‘had to pay’ them for sex. For example, Gary said, ‘He was in his forties, average body, not really what I was, at the time, you know... When you’re young, and someone is offering you photos and money, you don’t really find it very appealing’, Niall said, ‘I feel like he doesn’t get this a lot, a much younger, 18-year-old, twink, you know? It was rare for him’, and Amal said, ‘They were all quite similar actually, always older guys who offered money to fuck me’. Describing his use of social media platforms to meet other men for casual sex, Greg added:

This was a frustration for me, because I really wanted to meet someone my own age, but most of the responses I got were from much older men. I sort of went with it, I suppose, and then I got offered money for sex from a much older person.

The older age of most clients was often associated with other physical characteristics, such as body shape and hair, which indicated that the clients had less erotic capital than the participants thought of themselves as having during the photo-elicitation procedures. For example, Alex said, ‘He was a camp, fat, old man. He was in his forties, with a pot belly, a bit balding’, and Freddy said, ‘He was not the most attractive man in the world, let’s just

leave it at that'. These narratives highlight the significance of low erotic capital (associated with age) as a reason why some clients propositioned participants.

Other participants were more ambivalent about the age differences between them and their clients. For example, Amir said, 'He was very average looking. He wasn't toned, but he wasn't fat. He wasn't good-looking, but he wasn't ugly either, he was just average', Ethan said, 'I think he was thirty, and I was nineteen, at the time. I can't remember much about him, just that he had a larger body type, hairy, but he wasn't unattractive, in his face', and Kevin said, 'He was alright, he was about 30. I'm not into older guys, but he was good looking enough'. Adopting a more positive attitude towards his first client's age, Brandon said, 'He wasn't that old, he was in his late-thirties, I think. He was actually quite good-looking and, at first, I was thinking, "Why would he have to pay? There must be something wrong with him", but he was alright'. He added, 'I've always been attracted to older men, so that's not an issue'. Similarly, Connor said, 'He was older, but I like older guys. Not miles older, but borderline, mid- to late-thirties. He wasn't my type, but he was older, nice face, nice body—like, faded, you could tell he used to have muscle'. These narratives highlight how the older age of the clients was not always viewed as a 'problem', depending on the attitudes, expectations, and preferences of the participants.

Among the eleven participants who were paid for sex by men closer to their own age, in their early-, mid-, or late-twenties, youth also appeared to be closely associated with having more erotic capital (see 5.6 for how participants saw themselves as having more erotic capital, based partly on youth). For example, Elliott said, 'He lived at home with his parents, but still got his student loan and worked, so he had this really high income. I think I got with him for £80, because he was quite hot anyway'. Asked if this client's 'hotness' factored into the amount of money he accepted, he added, 'Oh yeah, definitely'. Similarly, Richard said, 'He was about 25... He had ginger hair, a really nice beard. I couldn't resist, and his body was pretty toned from the pictures he sent. Plus, at that point, I was attracted to him anyway'. Describing one of two clients in their twenties, Paul said, 'He was a good-looking guy, someone I would have slept with anyway... quite toned'. The only exception to these narratives of mutual attraction associated with similar age was Trevor who said, 'He was 24 or 25, roughly our age, but he was ugly'. Therefore, the association between the older clients and lower erotic capital was complemented by the association between younger clients and higher erotic capital, much as the participants thought of themselves as having high erotic capital. Of course, as these narratives suggest, there was a degree of ageism in how 'older'

men (even those who were not significantly older) were framed as being inherently less desirable. On the other hand, it is possible that the clients fetishized participants for their youth, reinforcing an unequal association between age and beauty (in both directions).

Describing another man in his 'late twenties', Adrian's only client was also described as being 'a disabled guy, in a wheelchair'. In this example, Adrian did not associate his client's disability with low erotic capital or needing to pay for sex:

I don't know whether disabled people find it harder to find people to have sex with, whether that plays a role in why he felt he wanted to pay someone to do it, but I don't think he was on Grindr to find someone to pay for it, it was just something that crept up in our conversation.

Similarly, describing an older client, Robin said, 'He's really nice, really interesting. He's got quite a noticeable physical disability'. He added:

I do feel sorry for him. It's interesting, because he's actually a very confident person who's had a successful career... And it's not like he's had some horrible, miserable, sexless life. He's had several long-term relationships. I think it's more to do with him currently being single, and I suppose there's a certain expectation that people should have age-appropriate relationships. But loads of middle-aged straight men run off with younger women. So, I think for him, he's like, "Sod it, how can I get someone who's young and pretty? I'll see if we can have some kind of financial arrangement", because he's also got loads of money.

Conversely, Alex did believe that his client's perceived disability was a factor in offering him money for sex:

He was a similar age, and I wouldn't say he was the ugliest guy, I would say he was average, so part of me was like, "Why do you have to pay for this?" Not that I'm complaining... But after we did the deed and started talking, I realised why. I've worked with autistic children, and I figured that this guy was somewhere on the autistic spectrum. So, I thought, maybe that's why. Maybe he's not very confident with guys, or they don't like him because of those tendencies.

Although he refused the money (excluding this young man from the total number of clients), in a similar example, Nick said:

I'm surprised I forgot this, the guy was 19. I'd have slept with him for free. The only reason he offered to pay is because he has social anxiety, and he doesn't want to do the whole going to a bar, having a few drinks, pulling someone and bringing them home, so he thought it was better to pay... We met on the pretence that he would pay, but I wouldn't let him, because no 19-year-old should have to pay for sex.

While Adrian and Robin did not consider the bodily differences of their clients relevant, these narratives contribute to considerations of sex work as a valuable therapeutic service, comparable with mainstream health and social care services. Alternatively, it could illustrate an individualistic, consumerist response to the ableism and ageism which exist in queer digital spaces. Alex and Nick's narratives also highlight that neuro-atypicality should also be considered in future research, alongside more visible disabilities (see Walby, 2012).

Alongside age and bodily differences, there was also a perception that the clients were more 'middle-class', 'wealthy', or 'rich' than the participants saw themselves as. This was most clearly indicated by discussions about their clients' income, profession, and property ownership. For example, George regularly met his only client in a 'very classy' part of London:

He lived in Chelsea, he had a townhouse. When it started happening, I was thinking, "This is ridiculous, who has this much money? Who lives in a house like this?" He had maids and everything. It was a complete mind-fuck, a clash of lifestyles really... Completely, how the other half lives, I was like, "I want to live like this". I think he was an investment banker, I think he worked for Goldman Sachs. I know he came from family money, too, because he said he had inherited some stuff.

Similarly, Matt said;

I should be clear, I don't know how rich he is, but he must be a millionaire. That's probably why he was so happy to give me money every time we met. He lives in this huge house, with a hot tub, so I would go over there and have drinks with him in the hot tub.

Relatedly, Brandon said, 'He worked for a banking firm, or something like that, something corporate anyway', and Jason said, 'His house was quite nice, so I assumed he was quite rich'. While only half of the participants thought of themselves as 'middle-class' (see 4.4), most of the clients were perceived to have 'middle-class' lifestyles and 'professional' careers,

with job titles including ‘accountant’, ‘banker’, ‘businessman’, ‘doctor’, ‘lecturer’, ‘local councillor’, and ‘television news presenter’. Elliott said of another client, ‘I think he was a school governor. He had a few high-flying roles like that, and he was the president of some charity’. Similarly, Marcus said, ‘With him making good money as a doctor, he kind of used that to bribe younger guys to have sex with him’, and Mo said, ‘The fifth one was a businessman who was visiting from London, and I actually quite liked him, because he turned up in a suit, and we went out for dinner first. I was wined and dined, and everything’. By comparison, highlighting that he had a similar level of educational and employment capital, Tom said:

He was in the pharmaceutical industry, I think. Pretty sure he was. He was in London for a conference, which is weird, because that’s what I do now. So, I think of him all the time, when I’m in work, doing these conferences and there are all these men in suits, and it’s exactly like him. I recently did a pharmaceutical event, which was weird. Like, what if I bump into him? That would be strange.

Relatedly, seeing interactions with some of his clients as helpful for building social capital, Chris said, ‘They were all London-based. The first one worked for a pension fund... and I thought he was a good contact for getting into the financial industry, so that was really helpful’. These narratives highlight how many of the clients were able to ‘compensate’ their lower erotic capital with higher economic capital (see 5.6).

In several examples, the economic privilege of the clients was also associated with their social status as ostensibly heterosexual, married, older men. For example, Ben said, ‘He was white, normal, married. I could tell by the ring... You could tell he was quite well-paid, too, professional’, Ash said, ‘It was this really old guy, he was about 40, white, fat, and married’, and Marcus said, ‘He was too old, and he was just a bit chubby, and he was boring. He had a wife and kids. Slightly despicable, if you think about it’. Elaborating on how being closeted and married to a woman may have influenced his client’s motivations, Nate said, ‘I think it makes him feel like he’s in control of it, and for him, it makes it seem like more of a business deal, because he wasn’t really dealing with his sexuality in terms of being gay’. One of the most interesting discoveries of Humphreys’ (1970) *Tearoom Trade* ethnography was that over half of the men having sex with other men in public toilets were married to women.

By contrast with those described above, other clients were characterised as having more traditionally working-class backgrounds, in various ways. For example, Ethan said of another client, ‘He was self-employed, I think, some sort of carpentry, joinery type of trade’,

and Dean said, ‘He had quite a thick Brummie accent. I don’t think he lived near the city... but he had a strong local accent. I think he worked in construction, maybe, or something along those lines, some sort of building job’. Referring back to our conversations about coming out in a less homophobic social context (see 5.3), Dean added, ‘That’s the impression I got. I think that kind of industry is interesting to work in for a gay person, and a man of that age, you can assume he’s gone through a harder time socially than I did’. Based on intersections of age and class, Dean distanced his client’s experiences of being gay from his own. These narratives further highlight the relevance of gay capital, a concept which may explain why some participants distinguished themselves from their older clients, given perceived differences in their coming out experiences and social networks (see 5.6).

6.4 Sex Acts, Roles, and Preferences

After being propositioned by clients on social media in the ways outlined above (see 6.2), the number of times participants agreed to sell sex varied significantly. Excluding indirect sex work such as webcamming (see 6.6), 19 participants sold sex just once, 15 between two and five times, 9 between six and nine times, and 7 ten times or more—although those with regular clients could only estimate, this study documented 358 individual sex acts between 125 clients and 50 participants. Turning to the first group, Harry said, ‘It was literally a once-off. I haven’t thought about it much since it happened’, Tom said, ‘This was just a one-time thing’, and Chris said, ‘It was more of a spontaneous one-night thing’. Among those who were paid for sex a handful of times, Greg said, ‘I was paid three times by the same guy, someone who propositioned me on Grindr’, Blake said, ‘It was three guys, probably 5 or 6 times’, and Ash said, ‘I’ve done it quite a few times at this point. I’d say five different guys, eight times in total’. Of the six participants who had been paid for sex more than ten times, Ryan, Ben and Jamie had a combination of regular clients and one-time encounters. Jamie was among the most ‘experienced’ in terms of selling sex:

They always suggested it. I met the most recent guy on Grindr. I would go over to his house, he’d suck me off, then I’d leave. We did that six or seven times... Another guy used to come to mine every two weeks, I’d fuck him, then he’d go back to his girlfriend. He gave me £100 each time. He was the most regular one, I probably met him 30 times. He was basically a fuck buddy, but he kept paying me.

On the other hand, Matt and George described themselves as having ‘sugar daddy’ arrangements, resulting in regular sex with just one client. As Matt said:

I’ve met him about 50 times by now, over the past year and a half. We met when I was a fresher. The first 5 times it was just blowjobs in his car, then after that we had proper sex 4 times, but it’s usually just been oral sex. He also asked me to top him once.

Although these six participants could not specify precisely how many times they had been paid for sex, their narratives account for most of the incidental sex work encounters (see 7.1 for further discussion of the money made from these encounters).

The most common sexual activity described by participants was oral sex, with 4 paid to give oral sex only, 16 paid to receive oral sex only, and 25 paid to do both—referring mainly to ‘blowjobs’ (fellatio), oral sex here also included ‘rimming’ (anilingus), as described by 8 participants. For example, Kevin said, ‘I just gave him a blowjob, then he gave me one’, Scott said, ‘It was never penetrative sex, it was just a bit of foreplay, essentially, and oral—giving and getting’, and Jacob said, ‘We had mutual oral sex. He rimmed me, I rimmed him’. Among the participants who gave oral sex only, Ash said, ‘It was all oral, I think. Me sucking them off’, and of those who received oral sex only, many were surprised that their clients paid them for this. For example, Alex said, ‘I was getting a free blowjob, performed on me, and 20 quid. So, happy days! We did it in his car’, and Peter said:

This message comes through, and it’s a guy offering to pay me, for *him* to blow *me*, and I was like, “Right, OK”. I thought about it for a good two days, he offered £250 for it, a significant amount of money for receiving a blowjob (original emphasis).

He added, ‘It was half-an-hour’s work for £250, and I got a blowjob out of it, even if I had to pretend it was someone else! Actually, I was thinking about the guy I mentioned earlier... my long-time crush’. Similarly, Ben said, ‘I didn’t have to do anything. He just sucked me off’, Richard said, ‘He only wanted to suck me off’, and Blake said, ‘He wanted to suck me off, and for me to cum. I didn’t have to touch him, nothing. £40, easy’. Similarly, Sam said, ‘He wanted to suck me off, give me a hand job, nothing in return, he just wanted to please me. He even said, “You can watch porn in my room, I’m happy with that”, and I was like, “Great!”’. He added, ‘You know, for a horny 18-year-old, that’s the best dream ever. I’m getting sucked off and I’m getting paid for it, as well... We met up 3 or 4 times, over the course of about 5 months’. Describing his first client, Freddy said, ‘The guy just wanted to suck me off, didn’t

want me to suck him off at all, and he was like, “Want to suck you off, willing to pay, can accom”, so I was like, “OK””. He added:

It was a blowjob for £20. Twenty quid in twenty minutes. I’ve never done penetration for money, I think that’s my straw, I can’t do that... I know people do anal for money, but it’s not my cup of tea, I wouldn’t do that. Having a dick in my mouth, that’s not *the same* (original emphasis).

Describing his second client, Freddy added, ‘I walked in, we kissed, he sucked me off, he rimmed me. I did suck him off a little bit, we did some poppers, and that was about half-an-hour... £20, both times, both blowjobs’. Participants were similarly surprised when their clients only requested masturbation. Oral sex also occurred during all but two encounters involving anal sex, although in these circumstances it was characterised as a form of ‘foreplay’, rather than the ‘main’ element of the encounter. As Kieran said, ‘We sucked each other off, but that was just foreplay. The reason he was paying me was to top him, so everything else we did was extra I suppose’. Generally, greater significance was placed on giving or receiving anal sex than oral sex, masturbation, or other sexual touching (also see 6.5 for discussion of ‘kinky sex’).

In Chapter Five, I described how participants understood their ‘current’, ‘future’, and ‘ideal’ sexualities using a nine-point scale (exclusively gay, gay, mostly gay, bisexual leaning gay, bisexual, bisexual leaning straight, mostly straight, straight, exclusively straight). I also highlighted the difficulty of categorising sexuality based on a single measure such as behaviour, identity, or orientation (see 5.1). Borrowed from Savin-Williams (2009), the sexual orientation form offers a more open-ended approach to understanding the complexity and fluidity of some people’s sexualities. Nonetheless, as a psychological or sexological measure focused on ‘orientation’ (as a biological characteristic), it remained rooted in a positivist and sex binary research tradition which several of the participants were sceptical towards, and which I critiqued in Chapter Three. Another important, but often neglected, dimension of sexuality concerns the sexual ‘roles’ participants described themselves as having. As Ashford (2009b) notes:

Queer virtual space is dominated by image, and within male orientated homo-cyberspace, the penis and, to a lesser extent, the male bottom and anus. The choice of these images alone can be significant in indicating whether an individual is seeking to “receive” or “give” penetrative sex (p. 298).

Here, too, one could imagine a nine-point scale of ‘multiple overlapping categories’ applied to sexual minority men’s behaviours, identities, and orientations, focusing on whether one is a ‘top’ (the insertive participant in anal sex), ‘bottom’ (the receptive participant in anal sex), or ‘versatile’ (both insertive and receptive): exclusively top, top, mostly top, versatile leaning top, versatile, versatile leaning bottom, mostly bottom, bottom, or exclusively bottom. Although I did not use such a scale during the interviews (an idea for future research), adopting something closer to the Kinsey scale, 11 participants identified themselves as top, 10 as mostly top, 15 as versatile, 9 as mostly bottom, and 5 as bottom. Only six claimed that they were ‘exclusively’ top or bottom, or ‘equally’ versatile, in terms of behaviour. As with the sexual orientation form, these labels can also be complicated by narratives of sexual fluidity (see 5.1 and 5.2). For example, when asked to describe his role in sex, Jaspal said:

It’s very fluid, it changes a lot. It changes with my personality, it changes with the seasons, it changes with the guy that I’m with. Sometimes you feel really dominant, sometimes you feel the opposite. When I first started having sex with guys, I would only fuck guys, and then I went through a phase of only being fucked by guys, and now I’m at a place where I’m like, “Hey, let’s just see where it goes”.

Similarly, Paul said, ‘Dominant top. Well, not massively dominant, I just like to take control... But I went through a stage of being very submissive, and I was a bottom for quite a while’. As these narratives highlight, the roles of ‘top’, ‘bottom’, and ‘versatile’ can be complicated further still by the inclusion of BDSM roles such as ‘dominant’, ‘submissive’, and ‘switch’ (see 6.5 for further discussion of ‘kinky sex’), alongside the association between ‘bottoming’ and femininity or ‘topping’ and masculinity (Logan, 2014). For example, describing the ‘identity politics’ of sexual roles, Hari said:

I guess there’s that “top or bottom” identity thing, that goes around, that the top is more masculine. Not that that has ever been my experience. I think that’s rubbish, actually, but it’s something that gets talked about a lot. It’s something straight people ask me about all the time: “Who’s the boy in your relationship?” If you met my boyfriend, the answer would be neither of us!

He added, ‘It’s very prevalent, and especially [because] the gay media reinforces it: “#Bottom”, or “This Boy Is a Bottom”—not that that isn’t one of the greatest songs of all time, but you know’. Although not all participants agreed, Hari’s critique of discourses surrounding sexual roles complements Walby’s (2012) critique of Logan’s (2017) rigid

association between topping, dominance, and hegemonic masculinity (see 3.3.3). Also ‘making fun of’ the idea that one’s sexual role is significant, while responding to the photo-elicitation procedures, Ethan said, ‘The up arrow, both way arrow, and down arrow was kind of a way for me to take the mic out of other people who try to advertise whether they’re top or bottom, using the arrow emojis’.

Alongside Jamie, Elliott and Robin were two of the most experienced participants and exclusively topped with clients who requested anal sex. Most participants performed anal sex in line with their general preferences. For example, identifying as a top, Dean said, ‘We just sucked, oral stuff, rimming, and then fucked. He was a bottom, I was a top. I am a full time top’, and identifying as a bottom, Amir said, ‘Most of them were just oral, but I’d say maybe five or six times were anal, with him penetrating me’. By contrast, George said, ‘I was always the top. OK, occasionally, once or twice, he wanted me to bottom, so after a few drinks I did’, Ryan said, ‘Generally, I prefer to top. I’m a really terrible bottom. Well, not terrible, but I prefer not to... I was a bottom for both’, and identifying as a bottom, Simon said, ‘The second time was me fucking him’. Some participants were very clear about their preferred sexual role with clients, before meeting. For example, identifying as mostly top, Paul said, ‘He messaged first, saying, “Looking to pay for fun”, then I said, “This is what I’m looking for, I’m a top”’. Others associated their preferred role with what they would (or would not) be willing to accept payment for. For example, Kevin said, ‘I’d never bottom for cash, so, I’d always top’. He added, ‘I would consider doing it, but only for someone I had some kind of connection with, like a long-term boyfriend’ (see 6.7 for discussion of the significance of emotions in the sexual encounters). One reason for seeking to avoid anal sex (especially if bottoming) was associated with the additional effort (or work) involved. As Matt said, ‘To be fair, having anal sex is a lot of effort. You have to make sure you’re clean and everything’, and Amir said, ‘Bottoming isn’t easy, it takes a lot of work’ (see 6.7 and 7.5 for further discussion of ‘forms of labour’ involved in incidental sex work).

Among the 16 participants who identified as ‘top’ or ‘bottom’, 7 performed oral sex only, 5 performed anal sex in line with their usual role, and 4 performed anal sex outside of their usual role when being paid to do so. Among the 19 participants who identified as ‘mostly top/top versatile’ or ‘mostly bottom/bottom versatile’, 6 performed oral sex only, 8 performed anal sex in line with their usual role, and 5 performed anal sex outside of their usual role. Among the 15 participants who identified as ‘versatile’, 5 performed oral sex only, 4 bottomed only, 3 topped only, and 3 did both. Overall, of the 32 participants who engaged

in anal sex with their clients, 11 topped, 12 bottomed, and 6 performed both roles with clients. Further challenging Logan's (2017) quantitative study of professional male escorting profiles, there was no obvious relationship between sexual roles and the amount of money participants were paid (see 7.1). Another challenge to Logan's use of hegemonic masculinity theory was offered by Walby (2012), who complicated the association between bottoming and passivity through the example of 'power bottoms' and other forms of touching which could be considered 'BDSM', 'fetish', or 'kinky' sex, which I turn to next.

6.5 Kinky Sex and Negotiated Consent

As with homosexuality and sex work (see Chapter Two), understandings of sadomasochism have historically been shaped by discourses of criminal law, psychology or medicine, and the feminist 'sex wars' (Khan, 2014; Newmahr, 2011; Rubin, 1982; 1991). Challenging these discourses, the 13 participants who were paid to engage in sexual acts which could be characterised as 'BDSM', 'fetish', or 'kinky' described their experiences without reference to criminality or pathology. The kink behaviours participants described most often involved forms of touching which might not be considered 'sex' under a narrow, heteronormative, or vanilla definition of the word (see 5.8 for a queer definition of sex). As Alex suggested, 'This one wasn't really sex, more of a sexual act. He was on Grindr, saying, "Right now, spank for cash", a 55-year-old man around my height, grey, balding, and he said, "£60 for me to spank you". He added:

Before I started talking to him, I asked, "So, what are you going to be spanking with?" and he said his hand. I asked, "How hard?" and he said, "Firm, but not really hard. I won't stop until you have a red bum, or I cum". So, I thought, "OK, that's fine, we'll do it on my turf, as this is new territory for me, and you'll have me over your knee".

Here, Alex's focus was on experimenting with a 'new' sexual activity in terms of comfort and safety. Similarly, Mike summarised one of his client's desires:

He was really into spanking people, so he wanted me to come over for that. Essentially—it sounds funny—he had a number of "things", his hand, for example... There was a slipper, then a wooden spoon, or something like that, I think there was a proper whip, by the end, and there was a leather strap. They were things which got increasingly painful.

He added, ‘The more painful, the more money I would get for it. Then he just wanted to have a wank afterwards, so apart from the spanking, he didn’t really have to touch me, or wank me off, or anything’. While Mike was not perturbed by the level of pain involved in this kink activity, describing it as ‘a bit of a fun challenge’, Blake went into more detail about his discomfort with a similar encounter:

He’s the one I’m most uncomfortable with, because it’s all about spanking, and it’s about using different implements. Very strict sessions. So, for the past week and a half, I’ve had an incredibly bruised arse. He is incredibly strange. Last time I went there, he put choir music on in the background, and I had to call him, “Sir”. He doesn’t take off his clothes, then at the end I just jerk him off.

Although Blake described this client as ‘sinister’ and ‘strange’, he went back a second time ‘because I want the money, obviously’ (see 7.2). Only one other participant described kinky sex in negative terms, also involving spanking, where he felt that the client neglected his consent. Nick said, ‘He tied me up, and spanked me, but whenever I was like, “No, that’s too hard”, he just put a gag in and carried on’. Nick’s experience highlights the importance of the widely promoted mantra among BDSM communities, ‘safe, sane, and consensual’ (see Barker, 2013; Nielsen, 2010). Supporting this, in most encounters involving kinky sex, consent was more explicitly negotiated than in the ‘vanilla’ encounters described above.

Despite his one negative experience, Nick was a keen advocate and practitioner of BDSM in both his paid and unpaid sexual encounters. Describing another client who was interested in paying him—at least partly—for his experience with kink and having the appropriate ‘kit’, Nick added:

The one after that was £150, for two hours, but he wanted to get properly kinky with me, so he said I needed to bring all my kit with me, all my restraints, rubber, the lot, to have a kinky session with him... I brought my stuff. I’ve got a load of rope, a load of restraints, a collar, ball gag, whip, blindfold, and a couple of cock rings... He tied me up, played with my nipples, whipped me, fisted me, fucked me, and that was it.

He added, ‘That was probably the best sex I’ve ever had’. Also asked whether he used BDSM equipment in his ‘everyday sex life’, Alex said:

Yeah, pretty much. If it’s sane and legal, I’m probably into it. That’s the way it works. If all I could do was kiss, suck, and fuck, I know I’d get bored, but you could have sex

with the same person for a year, and still not get through half the things you can do with rope, alone.

A further 18 participants mentioned enjoying kinky sexual behaviours as aspects of their ordinary sex lives.

Although most had less experience with kink than Alex or Nick, they also described positive experiences of being paid to experiment with such behaviours. For example, Tim said, ‘He had a foot fetish, and I agreed to let him indulge in that. He paid me £100, which I thought was a pretty good deal, given that I sort of liked the power behind it, being dominant’. Another form of kinky sex engaged in by three participants included elements of ‘dressing up’ or ‘roleplay’. As a medical student, Dan said, ‘The second time, he wanted me to put my scrubs on and give him a blowjob wearing my medical scrubs. So, I did that, and then some kissing, then he came’, and Rhys said, ‘He asked me to put on this leather suit, I think it was a gimp suit. Nothing happened in it, he just zipped me up, and that’s it really... I took it off, before I sucked him off’, and Sam said, ‘He wanted to do roleplay, which was totally new territory for me as well, but I was like, “Sure, why not?” We did that, had sex, and that lasted about three hours in total’. He added, ‘It was a case of him being at home, asleep, naked, and I was supposed to be a burglar, breaking in to his house. He said, “It really gets me off”, and I said, “Yeah, whatever makes you happy”’. Sometimes the roleplay aspect of the encounters centred around being paid for sex itself. For example, Ryan said, ‘We didn’t even have sex the first time, I just got the money, but it was a sexual thing for him... giving me control over his money’. Asked whether this made his client a ‘cash slave’, Ryan added, ‘That’s the term I was looking for... I didn’t take advantage, but I could have taken whatever I wanted, like when he gave me his card and pin number, I could have done anything with that, but I didn’t’. Relatedly, Robin said:

Quite a few people offer money, and sometimes they offer money specifically to do with a fetish thing, as some kind of financial fetish. Like, some people will say, “I want to spoil you. I want to do this, and I’ll give you this much money”.

Experimenting with payment as a sexual fetish was also described by the participants themselves, sometimes to find out if being paid for sex would be ‘a turn on’ for them, or not (see 7.3 for further discussion of this as a motivation for agreeing to sell sex).

6.6 Webcamming

In the three sections above I described different forms of ‘direct’ sex work which participants engaged in, including anal sex, oral sex, masturbation, or kinky sex acts including the use of objects, roleplay, and spanking. Alongside these sexual activities, 10 participants described performing webcam shows in return for payment, which Sagar et al. (2015) have characterised as an ‘indirect’ form of sex work. Although not the focus of this study, all participants were asked, ‘Have you ever performed webcam shows?’ Among those who had livestreamed erotic content (for money), the most popular site described was ‘Cam4’, alongside several of the same apps and sites where direct incidental sex work was arranged including ‘Squirt’ (see 6.2), while general purpose webcamming services such as ‘Skype’ and ‘Facetime’ were also mentioned. For example, Ben said, ‘I used to do a webcam show on Cam4, where fans would pay to watch me. That was when I was 19, because I lived alone. But I only accepted payment for it three or four times’, Simon said, ‘There’s a site called Chaturbate, where you can get paid for it, and I’ve done that’, and Rick said, ‘It was a few years ago. Mainly foreplay, just masturbating, I guess, not much else. It was on Cam4, I believe’. Stuart (2016) has suggested that without an ‘easily identifiable victim, and an above-board financial operation, the world of webcamming has confounded lawmakers and anti-sex work campaigners alike’ (see Chapter Eight for further discussion of policy).

Illustrating how direct and indirect (incidental) sex work cannot be considered as wholly separate activities, Amir said, ‘One guy used to pay for me to wank on cam for him... I think he wanted me to become a rent boy... He kept saying, “Would you be willing to be paid for sex?” and I said, “Yes”’. Similarly, Blake met his first client through webcamming:

It was on a webcam site, Cam4, then he added me on Skype... It would have been a good two and a half months later, but it was two and a half months of him messaging me, saying, “Come on, we need to meet up, now you live here”, which he hadn’t brought up before.

He added, ‘I did it on and off for three years. Sometimes, I just signed into Skype and thought, “If I’m going to have a wank, I may as well make some money”’. Describing how he ‘stumbled across’ webcamming, Ethan said:

I’ve done plenty of solo shows, and a few shows with a friend on Cam4. I found it when I was looking for porn, enjoyed what I was watching, then realised that I could

broadcast myself quite easily... I think the most I ever got out of a show was £75, but that was with a friend. I think the most I got on my own was about £30.

Six participants described livestreaming videos of themselves having sex with others, including friends or boyfriends. For example, Chris said, 'I made money on Cam4, with two friends. This was around the same time I got paid by that guy'. Describing being paid for sex by one of his 'regulars', Mo said, 'Squirt has a webcam chat feature. So, he paid me enough to motivate me to use that, while we were banging on camera'. Describing being paid for sex with his boyfriend on camera, Nick said:

Cam4, yeah. I did that with my partner at the time. He was a dom, and I was a sub, and depending on what the guy wanted him to do to me, he'd have to pay a certain amount of money. We did very well off that, for quite a long time. I think we made about three grand off it, over six months.

Asked if he saw that as 'different from the other times' he had been paid for sex directly, Nick said, 'Kind of, because it was having sex with someone I liked. I've never had any problem having sex with someone I like'. He added, 'Because you can't see them, it kind of becomes more normal, you normalize it in your own head, because it feels like a perfectly normal scenario, the only different thing is the webcam'. Both Ethan's account of stumbling across webcamming when looking for online porn, and Nick's account of being paid to engage in kinky sex with his boyfriend, correspond with descriptions of incidental sex work as an 'experimental' or 'exploratory' sexual activity (see 7.3).

The main problem participants identified with webcamming was around anonymity, or the fear of surveillance by others (see 7.7 for further discussion of fears about surveillance). For example, to protect his anonymity, Simon said, 'I never showed my face on it'. Expanding on the webcam shows he performed with his boyfriend, Nick said, 'We started doing it regularly when we realised how much money we could rake in from doing it. At one point, we had about 500 or 600 people watching our show at any one time'. Asked if he worried about videos being recorded and put 'out there' online, he added:

There used to be a sex shop in Bristol... and I know for a fact that my face was put up, and not only that, but it was broadcast around the gay scene, so I know it went around. That's also why I have so much trouble, when I'm talking to guys. Sometimes they'll block me for no reason, and the only thing I can assume... is that they're going

up to their mate, “Look who I’m chatting to”, and then they’re like, “Well, you don’t want to chat to him, because he’s done this”, that’s what I assume anyway.

Similarly, Trevor said, ‘I used to have a thing with my ex-boyfriend. It was infrequent, but we used to fuck on Cam4, until one of our videos got screenshot and passed around online, and it got back to everyone, so we stopped’. Sanders et al. (2017) describe how digital surveillance is a serious concern for online sex workers, including the unauthorised sharing of images, alongside (more longstanding) issues such as experiencing stigma for having a ‘reputation’ (see 7.6 for further discussion of the stigma attached to sex work).

As with the above comparisons between paid and unpaid (direct) sex, unpaid webcamming was also a common practice among the remaining 40 participants, 22 of whom had engaged in such behaviours online. Several participants used the same sites as those described above, without making any money. For example, Robin said, ‘I’ve never managed to make any money from it, so I’ve just been wanking off for my own entertainment. I’d always wear a mask or something, so I couldn’t be identified’, and Niall said:

I’ve looked into it, because I thought I could make money, and as it’s just me, I wouldn’t be in any sort of danger... Then I thought, given the industry I want to get into, I don’t want my face plastered over any porn websites. I mean, I don’t look down on porn. Kim Kardashian has done it, and she’s up there in the media, but I think it could prevent me from gaining a job, if I want to be in the media industry.

As these narratives highlight, digital surveillance was also a concern for those who performed webcam shows without being paid. As Chris said, ‘I suppose clever people could have recorded it, but I hope not’. Furthermore, among the 18 participants who had never performed webcam shows, several described avoiding webcamming for privacy reasons. For example, Dan said, ‘I’d never do that. I’m too worried about someone videoing. So many lads have put stuff up on Snapchat, then the girl or boy they’re sending it to has shared it on Tumblr, and it would be so embarrassing’ (see 7.7). These narratives suggest that it was the publicity of webcamming, and the potential for videos to be recorded and distributed by others, that made this a ‘risky’ behaviour, rather than the payment aspect of the interactions.

6.7 Emotional Connectivity

In Chapter Three, I highlighted how feminist scholarship has complicated and expanded understandings of the word ‘labour’ to acknowledge unpaid forms, traditionally performed by women, such as care work or domestic labour (see 3.2.5). Hochschild’s (1983) concept of *emotional labour* has been especially influential, contributing to analyses of the different forms of work expected of, and performed by, sex workers (Sanders, 2005). Alongside the sex acts described above, and the practical effort involved in preparing for the encounters, 15 participants also described engaging in forms of emotional labour such as cuddling and conversing with clients in a caring manner. For example, Brandon said:

We never actually had penetrative sex, it was just a lot of foreplay, and other stuff. It was a lot of kissing, a lot of touching going on. He liked to be cuddled for hours, which is quite interesting. But yeah, that’s when I said I had to do a time limit, because I couldn’t be there for hours—I’m not his mother!

Similarly, Tim said, ‘We had a cup of tea and a brief chat, which was very unusual, looking back on it. Then we went to his bedroom, I sucked him for a while, he fucked me. Oh, and then we cuddled afterwards’. He added, ‘Towards the end of it, when we were cuddling, I felt like I was more of a counsellor than anything. As in, he was telling me things about his life, and I was sort of nodding along kindly’. Expressing how he enjoyed forming a closer bond with one client through performing emotional labour, Elliott said:

I suppose it was a bit like acting, given that he’s not someone I would have chosen to hang out with if he wasn’t paying me, but it was still enjoyable, it was nice chatting. Who can complain if you’re drinking wine and eating pizza?

He added, ‘It was kind of like a date, really... I wasn’t intending to stay over, but we drank too much wine, so I couldn’t drive home. It wasn’t part of the original deal, but I didn’t mind’. Elliott also compared the emotional labour expected of him with clients to his day job:

Part of my job, now, there’s an element of sales, and a big part of sales is building up a relationship with someone so that they’ll buy something from you, even if you don’t really like them. It’s part of the sales process to engage with them, make them like you, so they’ll buy something from you. I suppose that’s a similar thing, what I was doing with them, that I could be chatty, and interested in them, and enjoying the time with them.

Emotionally connecting with the clients was a surprise for most participants, given that such forms of interaction had not been requested during their online interactions beforehand (see 6.2). However, as an exception to this, after negotiating a price with one client, Ethan said, ‘I said, “OK, what do you want?”’, and he said he just wanted to kiss and cuddle. So, I went around, he gave me the money up front, then we kissed, cuddled, and I gave him a hand job’. He added:

I think he wanted a kind of *boyfriend simulation*, which is why he wanted to kiss and cuddle, in front of the TV, and that’s why he wanted to get the payment aspect out of the way at the start, done with, so he could just indulge in it. So, I think for him, I think there was an emotional aspect to it, of some sort (emphasis added).

Asked if he had felt any emotional connection to this client, Ethan added, ‘No, I was just doing what I was asked to do’. Similarly, Greg said, ‘I don’t even think he wanted the sex particularly, I think he wanted affection more than anything else’. He added, ‘I just thought it was weird, because you know, the idea of having a relationship with somebody that age was ridiculous in my view’. Several other participants mentioned encounters in terms of creating a ‘boyfriend experience’ for their clients. Describing one client whom he spent a whole week with for £800, Tom said:

It was legitimately like being his boyfriend, for a week. He was cute, he was interesting, he was a nice person, and I enjoyed his company a lot. I even said, “You don’t have to pay, let’s just hang out during the week”, but he said, “No, I want to pay for you”.

Asked about his ‘most memorable experiences’ of being paid for sex, Tom added, ‘I guess, it was just nice. I like being in intimate relationships with people, it’s when we are at our most vulnerable, and happiest, too’. By contrast with Tom, most participants suggested that there was little or no meaningful emotional connection during their encounters with clients (see below).

Some participants who performed emotional labour during their encounters felt that being asked or expected to perform such a ‘role’ was highly inauthentic (see Bernstein, 2007 for further discussion of ‘bounded authenticity’ in sex work). For example, Dan said, ‘It’s a bit like doing porn. Not that I’ve done porn, but it’s how I imagine porn would be. You have to act like you’re enjoying it, to please an audience’. He added. ‘I didn’t mind it, I just didn’t *enjoy* it, because it felt really artificial. It was alright, but I wouldn’t say I *enjoyed* it. I mean, I

wasn't in love with him. So, for me, it's not very appealing' (original emphasis). Similarly, Ryan said, 'I suppose it was a bit like acting, because he's not someone I would have chosen to hang out with, if he wasn't paying, but it was still enjoyable, it was nice chatting'.

Describing how he 'played the role' with a different client, Ethan (see above) also said:

I knew that he wanted there to be emotions there, or at least in that moment, at that time. So, I sort of donned a character, and got quite into that, to the point where after a couple of hours it didn't take any effort for me to give him what he wanted. I even got a little bit attached, myself, but then afterwards I was able to pull myself out of that. I realised what it was. I didn't actually feel anything for him, I was just pretending to.

Given that incidental sex work was not thought of as a 'professional' activity, or even a form of 'labour' at all (see 7.5), most participants did not explicitly characterise their performance of such roles as forms of 'emotional labour'. Rather, the introduction of emotional aspects to the encounters was generally framed in positive terms (see below; Walby, 2012).

While most participants who engaged in emotional labour with clients described this in terms of enhancing their 'enjoyment' of the encounters, the 22 participants who said there was 'no' emotional connection with their clients tended to express this in neutral terms. For example, Scott said, 'No, we barely spoke', Alfie said, 'Nope, no emotions at all. I didn't even know his name', and Marcus said, 'No. Especially with Grindr, if... they tell you it's going to be a hook-up, and it's a one-off, then you know there is going to be no feelings'. Relatedly, Luke said, 'I didn't really chat to him that much. Well, a bit before it happened, but nothing that deep. It wasn't completely careless and disliking, but it wasn't a big emotional attachment'. Expanding on his five encounters, Paul said, 'No, not really. It was very black and white. It was, I suppose, like a transaction of goods. You're providing them with something, and they're paying you for it'. Similarly, Adrian said, 'I knew I was there to do a job, that's the way it worked, so it wasn't as casual. That's the only way I can describe it, really. It was more like a transaction, with quite rigid rules' (c.f. 6.8 and 7.5). For some, the transactional nature of the encounters was framed in more negative terms, reducing their enjoyment of the sex. For example, Ash said:

Not really, no. It was weird because it ruined my experience, actually... I always thought, when I was younger, I would try to get into porn and stuff, because it would fulfil my ideology of being desired. But then like when I was doing this it just ruined my appetite for it.

Returning to the theme of authenticity, Dan said, ‘I don’t like it, it feels a bit fake. You have to act, to pretend to enjoy it, and it’s a bit weird. It’s a bit odd’. Relatedly, Jacob said, ‘I think he fed off a lot of my emotions, as well, because I wasn’t very good at hiding that I wasn’t enjoying it, so he could tell, and that made it less good’. He added that there was:

No emotion to it, at all. If I could, I would have gladly have left my body at that point, but I think that was just because of our age difference. Now, I think I would... learn to put feeling that emotion away, whereas then, I was just focusing on emotions, you know, puberty and shit, you don’t really fake it, or learn to hide it.

Describing how he purchased Viagra, which ‘used to be sold over the counter at the village sauna’, before his incidental sex work encounters in order to ‘fake it’, Mike said:

There wasn’t an emotional attachment to any of them, and whereas I can normally have sex any day, any time, with someone who I find attractive, I needed drugs to be able to do it... The only reason I did it was because of the money (see 7.2).

In many ways, these descriptions of the difficulty involved in performing forms of emotional labour highlight the skill involved in (professional) sex work (Wolkowitz et al., 2013).

By contrast, when there *was* an emotional dimension to the encounters, whether framed in terms of emotional labour or not, this was perceived to enhance the experience of selling sex. For example, when asked, ‘Were there any emotional aspects to the encounter?’, Robin said:

There was definitely quite a nice emotional aspect to it. I almost think of him as a friend. With him, I don’t really consider it work, but that’s because he’s the only one who I really like. I mean, it is quite obvious that he is a client, he gives me money each time we meet, but then there’s that whole thing of, well, he’s earning well over £100,000 anyway (see 7.4 for Robin’s view of ‘generational inequality’ as a factor).

Similarly, because he ‘enjoyed it’, Dean said, ‘It didn’t feel like sex, as it has with other guys. I think because it was *good* sex, it felt more emotional. But I never went on to think, “Maybe I’ll see him again”, that didn’t occur to me’ (original emphasis). These narratives are supported by the ways in which participants defined the word ‘sex’, where emotions were thought to alter the experience of sex in positive ways. As Trevor said, ‘Sex is about emotions. It’s not very good if you don’t like the person you’re having sex with’. The themes explored in this section also have relevance for debates about masculinities (see 3.3.3), given

that they do not conform with research drawing on Connell's (1992) hegemonic masculinity theory to understand male sex work. For example, Kumar, Scott, and Minichiello (2017) found that 20 (professional) online male escorts described their labour in traditional terms of 'toughness', 'technical skill' and 'hard work', contrasting this with female sex workers, who have been found to frame their labour in terms of 'emotional care' and 'social work' (see Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Deshotels and Forsyth, 2006). These narratives also support the notion that participants did not think of their commercial sex as entirely separate from their casual sex encounters, a comparison which I turn to next.

6.8 Difference from 'Regular' Sex

Throughout this chapter I have noted the ways in which many participants framed their commercial sexual encounters in similar terms to their casual sexual encounters. This included how the encounters were arranged online, different forms of 'labour' performed before and during the encounters, and the use of digital media to share sexual images (e.g. webcamming). When compared with the results in Chapter Five, the main differences between incidental sex work and unpaid sex appears to be the higher economic capital and lower erotic capital (based mainly on age and body type) of the men with whom they had sex, and the exchange of one form of 'capital' for the other (see 8.4 for further discussion of exchanging erotic capital for economic capital). Furthermore, as noted in the previous section, the exchange of money for sex also influenced how some participants felt about the encounters, emotionally. To conclude this chapter, I will turn to the responses given by participants to the question: 'How was being paid for sex different from other sexual encounters you've had?' to further evidence that the boundary between casual and commercial sex is a blurred one in incidental sex work encounters.

In response to this question, 27 participants suggested that there was 'little' or 'no' difference between their incidental sex work encounters and unpaid sexual experiences. For example, Luke said, 'No, it was kind of like a general hook-up', Tom said, 'Not really, it was just normal, but obviously he was older, so he was showing me the ropes I guess', and Robin said, 'It wasn't that different, to be honest, it was quite similar'. He added, 'Because lots of the free sex I have is the same kind of thing, so it's not that different, but I suppose there's the question of what my motivations were?' (see 7.2 and 7.3). Highlighting how only the payment aspect of the encounter made the sexual experience different, Jason said:

Usually, hook-ups, you don't get paid for them. Other than that, it's not very different, apart from feeling like you're doing it just to get something, at the end of it, which I guess you are. Yeah, it's not much different, apart from the money aspect.

Similarly, Rick said, 'It probably did feel a bit more transactional, because I'm not really used to that... It was a bit seedy in that respect, not that that's a bad thing', and Jeremy said, 'It was no different, apart from the money'. Even when their paid sexual encounters were not enjoyable, this was often compared to unpaid sexual encounters. For example, Tim said, 'Not that I was closing my eyes, but if I didn't think about who I was having sex with, it was perfectly good sex'. He added, 'So, was it any different? The conclusion I've reached is no, it wasn't radically different. Now, I've had better sex, but I've had much, much, worse sex, too'. Similarly, Jacob said, 'I mean, I've had shit hook-ups with other guys, where once you've done it, you just leave. Quite recently, actually, I met a guy and it was, "Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am"'. Some guys you never meet again', and Robin said:

To be honest, it was quite similar. I've often gone into situations, thinking, "Oh, why am I doing this? Am I just doing this because I'm horny? Actually, I'm not that attracted to them", or you meet them, and you don't get on with them that well.

He added, 'Lots of the free sex I have is very similar, so I suppose it wasn't that different'. Three participants did frame their experiences as 'different', but in positive terms, noting that they enjoyed the sex *more than* their unpaid sexual encounters. For example, Richard said, 'With regular hook-ups, it tends to be more rough, but with him, he was really soft, gentle, he was pretty nice as well, caring, I had a good time... Probably at the top of my list for sexual experiences'. This was mirrored by Nick's comment that one of his encounters was 'probably the best sex I've ever had' (see 6.5).

By contrast, 19 participants did think there was a notable difference between paid and unpaid sexual encounters. For example, Will attributed the difference between casual and commercial sex to the lack of *mutuality* in his encounters: 'Obviously, with a regular hook-up, it wouldn't be the same sort of thing, it's more of a mutual thing with a regular hook-up. ... Whereas when I get paid, I'm thinking, "Do I need things?"' Asked what he meant by 'mutual', Will added, 'I guess you could say it changes the dynamic, because in a regular hook-up, it would be *shared*, naturally, but with them... there's just no emotional connection' (original emphasis). Also describing his desire for mutuality, George said, 'I feel like sex is different, in two ways: sex in a relationship and sex not in a relationship, where it's, "I'll

scratch your back if you scratch mine, please”...He knew how to scratch my back, sometimes it was good, but sometimes I just wouldn’t want to be there’. As noted in the previous section, for some participants, the lack of emotional connection with clients reduced their enjoyment of the experience. This was also highlighted as a ‘difference’ between paid and unpaid sex. For example, Tim said, ‘No, and that was the unusual thing. Normally, if I meet someone, to have sex with them, I like to meet them beforehand, you know, have coffee with them, or go for a walk with them, or something’. Despite describing himself as a ‘counsellor’ to this client (see above), Tim added, ‘There was no attempt at friendship, or anything like that, so there was no emotional aspect to it for me’. Alongside the lack of emotional connection, lack of erotic attraction was also flagged as something which made the encounters ‘different’. For example, Peter said, ‘It was definitely more difficult for me to get it up. I kind of had to close my eyes and pretend it was someone else. Literally, that’s what I had to do’, and Mike said:

I guess, normally, if I was going to meet someone off Grindr... I’d want to see a lot of pictures first, and fancy them at least, but with him it was different because I didn’t really fancy him. The allure of it was something slightly different.

Describing how he had to ‘fake an orgasm’, Ryan said, ‘With the 57-year-old, I was not aroused at all. I was hard, but not in the moment, so I kind of spat on my hand and told him that I came... I wasn’t attracted to him in any way’. He added, ‘You know, guys have sex for free on Grindr anyway, the only difference here was that he was in his late 50s’. Also highlighting their age difference, Dean said, ‘I think he’s the oldest person I’ve had sex with, so that makes a difference. There was that aspect, but I didn’t feel much weirder than having sex with someone else in their forties, really’. These narratives suggest that while most participants saw little or no difference between their incidental sex work encounters and ‘casual’, ‘regular’, or ‘usual’ sexual encounters, the main factors which distinguished them were based on erotic, emotional, and economic differences, alongside forms of ageism. In Chapter Seven, I will explore the role of economics, inequalities, and identity politics in how participants made sense of incidental sex work, including motivations for agreeing to sell sex.

Chapter Seven:

Sexual Economics, Inequalities, and Identities

7.1 Money Made from Incidental Sex Work

In the previous chapter I outlined the different sex acts participants were paid to perform by their clients. Several questions left unanswered here included how much money they received for these different sex acts, what their motivations were for agreeing to sell sex, and their perspectives on sex work identities, stigma, and laws. These are the themes which this chapter will explore, with a focus on the economic dimensions of incidental sex work, and what—if anything—distinguishes it from professional sex work, other forms of labour, and how dominant discourses of crime, deviance, and pathology informed how the participants thought about themselves and others who sell sex. Turning first to the money made from incidental sex work, the two charts below highlight the amount of money made for the 358 direct sex acts described by participants, including ‘bottoming’, ‘topping’, ‘both’ (versatile), ‘Oral Only’, ‘Kink Play’, and ‘Masturbation’ which includes both the highest (£500) and lowest (£10) amount paid for a single sex act (see Figure 7). I have not included the amount of money made for ‘webcamming’ (see 6.6) because participants could only give a rough estimate of how many times they had performed this form of sex work, and it tended to be for significantly less money (per individual act). It should be noted that the bars appear ‘flat’ in places, indicating the same sex acts being paid the same amount multiple times. This tended to be caused by the 6 participants who had one ‘regular’ client. For example, Matt’s only client paid him ‘£50 or £60 each time, over 50 times’ (estimated at £3,350) mostly for oral sex but also anal sex on four occasions, while Elliott had 8 clients, but only one he described as ‘basically a fuck buddy’ who ‘paid £100 every time’ (estimated at £4,720). Making more money from incidental sex work than anyone else, George said that he made, ‘More than enough to put down a deposit on my mortgage’ (estimated at £15-16,000—I have used the lower estimate, putting it at £375 for each encounter). He added, ‘We probably met over 40 times, over the course of three years... One reason I made so much from him was because, being a millionaire and living in central London, he would buy me these outrageously expensive gifts’. It could be argued that the regularity of these encounters makes them distinctive from ‘incidental sex work’ as the participants and I defined it (see 7.5).

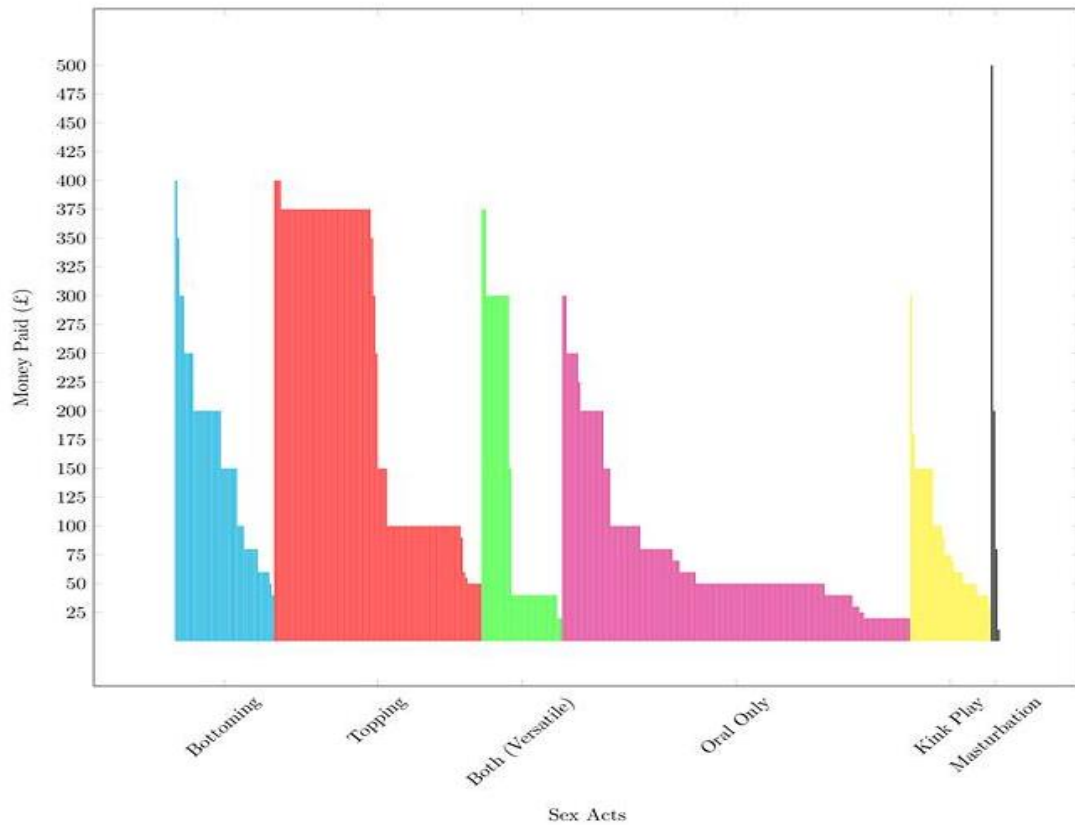


Figure 7: Bar Chart of money made from 358 direct sex acts (By Dom Birch)

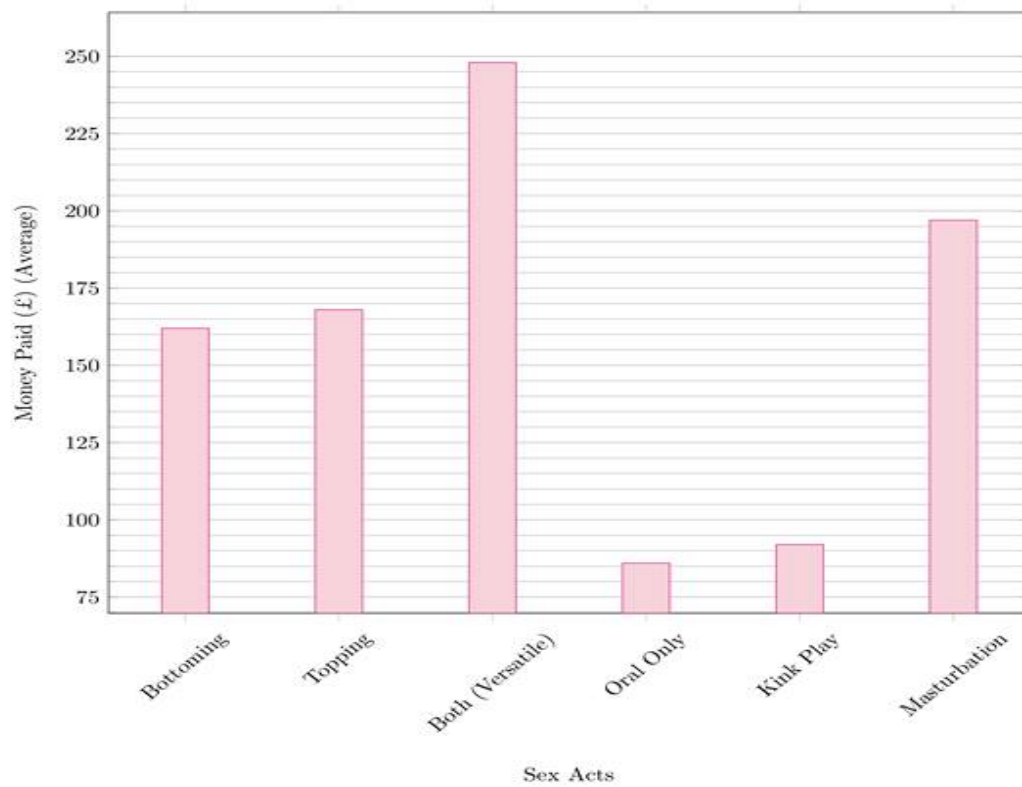


Figure 8: Bar chart of average money made for different sex acts (By Dom Birch)

While it is likely that there is a ‘grey area’ between incidental and professional sex work, whatever distinction used will be arbitrary to an extent. Nonetheless, to provide a clearer representation of the (average) differences between the amount paid for different types of sex act, for the second chart (see Figure 8) I have removed all but one encounter with ‘regular clients’ (e.g. rather than counting all 30 encounters Elliott had with the same client for £100, counting just one such encounter).

The total amount of money made by the participants was slightly over £49,000. The highest amount paid for anal sex was £400, as described by both Robin who topped and Jaspal who bottomed, while the lowest amount was £40 or £50, as described by Nick who bottomed and Gary who topped, respectively. The smallest amount paid for any sex act was £10 for mutual masturbation, as described by Andy, while the largest amount paid for a single encounter was £500, which Mo described: ‘We didn’t even have sex. He just rammed his cock against me, he didn’t go inside, he was banging up against me, then he came’ (this encounter was counted as ‘masturbation’ in Figures 7 and 8). Asked why his client had paid so much, Mo added, ‘I think he was both horny and lonely, and really he just wanted the human contact, however brief’. While these figures do not clearly support Logan’s (2014) suggestion that tops carry a higher premium (on professional male escorting websites), participants were paid to top significantly more (89 times) than they were paid to bottom (38 times)—not represented by the averages. However, various factors complicate any simplistic explanation of this, such as the greater effort involved in bottoming, not to mention other sex acts engaged in, and the emotional labour described by some participants which created unique dynamics between some of the participants and their clients. Money was also an important factor in how the participants weighed up agreeing to sell sex, and how they felt about their experiences and identities more broadly, which I turn to next.

7.2 Economic Motivations

Turning to the question of what motivated participants to engage in incidental sex work, a range of (often overlapping) themes emerged including economic necessity, economic opportunity, sexual thrill, and even sexual boredom (see 7.3). When asked, ‘What were your motivations?’, the most common answer was simply ‘the money’. Thirteen of these participants suggested that their motivation was based on economic need, to pay for essentials such as food, rent, or utilities. This was often associated with having an inconsistent,

insecure, or low income. For example, Blake said, 'The motivation is money. I need to save up for January, and supply teaching does not pay well, at all, and it's inconsistent'. He added, 'I'm not materialistic, or money-oriented, but the money isn't guaranteed, and the pay isn't great, and Christmas is coming'. Similarly, Dean said, 'I spent the money on standard things, whatever I needed, food for that week. Because it was January, and everyone's poor in January', Kieran said, 'Back then, I was broke, I couldn't even afford to shop, so I figured I'd be able to get food in for the week', and Connor said:

I was proper broke at the time. Proper broke. It paid for food shopping, drinks for a couple of weeks, then other bits and bobs. It didn't buy me a holiday, or a PlayStation, or anything like that, I just used it to get by. My parents don't support me, so that's why I have a job.

Asked how he would have 'got by' without the additional income, he added, 'I have no idea, honestly. It was great timing'. Working for minimum wage in Primark, Josh contrasted the amount he could be making through sex work with his current income during the interview: 'I do work loads of hours. Since Christmas, I've been on £6.64 an hour. Raking it in, yes! Because I was only on £4.64 an hour, before I turned 18. It's an amount I can live on, hopefully'. Comparing his low income to those of professional sex workers he knew, Hari said, 'Some of my friends make their entire rent in an hour, and that would make life a lot easier than what I live on, which is very little, to be honest'. Alongside insecure employment (see 3.2.1), debt and unemployment were also mentioned by several participants. Explaining that he was unemployed when he agreed to sell sex, Nick said:

I was broke, at the time. I had just lost my job, I had to run a car, and I was only on £70 a week from the job centre. So, I had to do something about it, and that was the easiest money I've ever earned.

He added, 'I spent the money on petrol to run my car, mainly, and a few drinks out'. Describing how the money had helped to pay off debts, Trevor said, 'I really needed the money because I had bills to pay, I wasn't earning very much, and my bank account was in the overdraft, so I couldn't take anything out'. Describing the money he made from webcamming (see 6.6), Ben said:

I think I used most of that money to pay off debt... I hadn't really accounted for how expensive heating a three-storey-house would be, with gas. There was this kind of

cycle, where I was paying off the bare minimum every month, but not really paying for anything else, so it was helpful.

Most of these expenditures fit the definition of ‘essential’ spending provided by the Office for National Statistics, including ‘food and non-alcoholic drinks’, ‘electricity and gas’, and ‘housing costs for renters and mortgage holders’ (ONS, 2017). Eight of the nine participants quoted above identified as working-class, suggesting a relationship between class inequality and economic necessity as a motivation for selling sex as a way to supplement low wages.

Among the 25 participants enrolled in full-time education, 12 suggested that being a student was an additional economic burden which influenced their decision to sell sex. For example, Marcus said, ‘I think with us, as students, especially if you’re at university, money can be so tight’, Ethan said, ‘I was a student, so I was struggling for money at the time, I needed everything I could get’, and Elliott said, ‘I was a student at the time, and I thought, “250 quid, that’s a lot of money”, so I said, “Yeah, definitely”. I could sleep with someone even if I didn’t fancy them for £250’. Noting the economic challenges (other) students may experience with debts, Jaspal said his motivation was:

The money. My dad gave me some money towards my degree, and I worked the whole time I was studying, so I wasn’t in any debt... But the economy wasn’t great at the time. So, obviously, back then it was the money that motivated me.

Similarly, Niall said:

At that time, I was struggling for money quite a bit. My parents do support me with £200 per month, towards my living, and they pay my rent, because I’m in full-time education. I’m looking for a part-time job, but still, I felt that the money would be great for me. Because sometimes I’m just living off microwave meals and shit, so it would be nice to have that, and I just wanted nicer clothes and things. I think I can be quite superficial.

Amir also said that his motivation was, ‘Purely that I didn’t have any money at that point... It was literally so I could save up some money to pay rent, in case I couldn’t get a job over the summer’. Although framed in similar terms of being poor and in debt, the participants who were students tended to have parental support, and spent more of their earnings on non-essential consumer goods and services (see below). For example, despite describing himself as ‘really broke’, Amir added that an additional motivation was because, ‘I was going out on

Friday, so it paid for my night out'. Similarly, Ethan said, 'Most of it went towards food shopping for that week, but some probably went towards alcohol, as well. I was a student at the time, so yeah, it was just studenty things', and Sam said, 'At the time, I think I bought new clothes and alcohol. Standard studenty things'. As students, these participants spent their earnings from incidental sex work on a combination of essential and non-essential items. This complements analysis by the Student Sex Work Project, which found significant numbers of undergraduates engaging in commercial sex to support themselves in the context of 'an increase in student debt' (Sagar, et al., 2015, p. 9).

Although not framed in terms of economic 'necessity' or 'need', 21 participants said that the money was a motivating factor as an added 'bonus' or 'benefit'. For example, Andy said, 'I've never thought, "Oh, I'm short on cash, let's do this, I'm gonna sell myself for money". That's never occurred to me. On the occasions that I have been paid for sex, it's been an added perk'. Similarly, Ben said, 'It was just a bonus', and Matt said, 'It's definitely an added benefit'. In the following section, I explore how this 'added bonus' often related to the sexual desires of the participants themselves. However, it is worth noting that most of the participants who framed their motivations in these terms also spent their earnings on non-essential, consumer goods and services, including food and alcohol consumption with friends and partners, or even gift-giving. For example, asked what he spent the money on, Rhys said, 'Actually, I went to Brighton, I went shopping with my mates. I treated them for the whole day. I was like, "This is dirty money, we need to spend it guys!"' Similarly, Scott said, 'Essentially, I used it to go out, for a night out with friends', and Jason said, 'Well, I got an Uber home which was about £7. Then I think I spent the rest on going out, the following weekend. I can't really remember, I think it was just going out'. Similarly, Marcus said:

Well, I called my best friend, and we went to the cinema with it, and the sales were on, so I got a new pair of trainers, and went out for dinner. £150 doesn't really go too far when you do a lot of things with it.

Describing how their boyfriends knew about their incidental sex work encounters (see 7.7 for further discussion of disclosure to others), Alfie said, 'It paid for dinner out that night, and a nice bottle of wine, which my boyfriend appreciated', and Trevor said, 'Almost every time, I would have spent the money on nights out with my partner... It's never really been put towards anything serious'. In addition to spending their money on food and drinks (for others), purchasing gifts for special occasions was described by several participants. Richard

said, 'Because my brother's birthday was coming up, I spent it on him. He wanted to take his driving test, so I bought that for him', and Scott said, 'It was coming up to Christmas, and I was struggling for presents and stuff, so the money was helpful for that'. Spending their money on or with other people indicated how selling sex was an economic 'bonus', rather than an economic 'need', for these participants.

Evidencing a higher level of economic capital among many participants (see 4.4), particularly those who identified as upper-middle-class or middle-class, 16 described spending their earnings from incidental sex work on luxury consumer goods and services, including high-end electronics, fashion items, and tourism. For example, Daniel said, 'Well, I haven't spent the £100 yet, but I wanted to get something from John Lewis, it's like a risotto maker by Heston Blumenthal', and Ryan said, 'I bought myself things that I really wanted, so I got a PlayStation 3, once. It was just really random stuff that I never would have bought otherwise'. Characterising his second incidental sex work encounter as 'opportunistic', Freddy said:

I had already gone shopping that day, I bought two pairs of jeans, and thought, "Shit, that's 60 quid. I'm meant to be saving money, not spending it" ... That was the reason for it, because if he gives me 50 quid, then I just bought two pairs of jeans for a tenner!

He added, 'When I got home, my mum asked, "What did you buy?" and I said, "These jeans for £60". She said, "That's so much money, let me buy one of them for you", so I came away with a profit!' Similarly, Greg said, 'It was probably spent on new clothes', Josh said, 'Clothes, clothes, and more clothes', and Adrian said, 'I went shopping afterwards and bought myself a new outfit. It worked out quite well'. Asked if he spent all the money that day, he added, 'I think I saved about £20 for the next weekend'. Trying to save up money for a 'lad holiday' before going to university, Peter said:

It was originally intended to be a lad holiday, but then I ended up going to Paris with three girls, because I realised that I didn't like many of the lads that I knew, so it ended up as a cultural trip with some girls, and one guy friend. I did have a job, but I was extravagant with money, so I didn't have enough, and the time was approaching where our trip was about a month away, and I was thinking, "What can I do to get some extra money?"

Similarly, asked what his motivations were, Peter said, ‘The money. I was just thinking about the holiday, and what I would need, it pretty much covered all the expenses I would need, so it was just a means to an end’. Even when paying for food, rent, or bills (see above), earning ‘extra’ money through incidental sex work was sometimes a way to subsidise additional spending, including long-term investments in accommodation and transportation. For example, Ethan said, ‘It was mostly spent on food, but I put some of it away for a deposit... and I put some money down on a deposit for a new bike, then saved up the rest to buy the bike myself’, and Sam said, ‘I’ve saved up most of it. I’m saving for driving lessons, and a car eventually. With serious money like that, I can’t really squander it on stupid things, so I want to put it towards something worthwhile’. Suggesting that his client supported him in making more ‘sensible’ investments, he added, ‘I think he supports it, he’s said, “Oh, well, I’ll give you a bit more if you’re putting it towards that”’. As the narratives of Ethan, Sam, and others highlight above, there was rarely a single economic motivation (e.g. necessity or opportunity) for agreeing to sell sex incidentally.

7.3 Sexual Motivations

In addition to the *economic* motivations for engaging in incidental sex work described above, 31 participants said that they had *sexual* motivations for agreeing to sell sex, including sexual ‘boredom’, ‘experimentation’, ‘opportunity’, and ‘thrill’. These answers were often linked to how participants used dating and hook-up apps such as Grindr more generally. For example, Kevin said, ‘Basically, it was just boredom... I was online and horny at the time’, Andy said, ‘The most recent time, I was kind of looking to hook-up with somebody anyway, then somebody was willing to offer me money for sex, and we’d been chatting, we’d exchanged photos, I felt comfortable meeting up with them’, and Mike said:

It was after my final exam, so I was feeling a bit hedonistic, and I was enjoying life. I guess I was quite drunk, and quite horny, and I was on Grindr. I’d never really entertained the idea of being paid for sex before. I didn’t think I would want to do it, but then this guy messaged me.

Being ‘horny’ when offered money for sex was also mentioned by Rhys, who said, ‘Well, I was horny, I wanted the sex, and I wanted the cash. So, I thought it was an easy way to get both. It didn’t take much persuasion, or much effort, I just did it’, and Matt, who said, ‘I was really horny at the time, so I probably would have met him even if he didn’t offer me the

money, but he said he wanted to, he was generous with it'. He added, 'As I said, I would probably do it for free anyway'. Similarly, Amir said, 'With him, literally it was, "Well, this is a happy accident", I would have slept with him anyway', Hari said, 'It's Grindr. I thought, "Well, I would probably do it for free, anyway, with some other guy, so why not let him do it?"', and Paul said:

He was an attractive guy, someone I would have slept with anyway. It just added a different dimension to it, in some way. I think the heat must have got to me in the summer, I don't know. It was interesting, quite exciting I suppose, just trying it out.

As these narratives highlight, several of the participants would have met either their client, or someone else, for sex without payment had they not received the offers online. They also support the theme of the money being an 'added bonus' as outlined in the previous section.

Being motivated by sexual boredom was also associated with economic motivations, and most participants expressed having multiple motivations for engaging in incidental sex work. Putting emphasis on 'the money more than the sex' as his primary motivation, Josh said of one client, 'For this one, I was sitting around the house with nothing better to do, when he made the offer'. Also combining both economic and sexual opportunism, Hari said, 'Part of me wanted to try it, or maybe that sounds crazy. I don't know, I wanted to see if I could do it. I mean, it's a good source of income, if nothing else', and Robin said:

I was sort of horny anyway, because I was on Grindr, and then I was like, "Great, a hundred quid". Money is quite an obvious motivation... and I suppose there is something a little bit exciting about it. You know, "Look, I'm a filthy prostitute". As in, I think there's a bit of a turn-on factor of being a slut.

Being 'turned on' by the idea of being paid for sex was also a factor for several participants, which I turn to next.

In the previous chapter, I noted how several participants were paid to engage in kinky sexual behaviours including roleplay, which some characterised as 'experimental' (see 6.5). For 9 participants, part of their motivation was also to 'experiment' with selling sex, to explore if this would arouse them. For example, Simon said, 'I found it kind of kinky, in a way, I found it kind of hot'. He added:

It was the money, mainly, but sometimes I'd be in my room, looking at the app, and they'd be like, "Do you want to come over for money?" and I'd be like, "Hmm, that's

kind of kinky”, at the same time. I’d actually wank about it, before I’d go, not because of him—because he’s disgusting—but because of the idea of it.

Similarly, Paul said:

I suppose I did need money at the time, but I didn’t think of it in that way. It was more that it gave me an excuse to try it out. I was curious to see if being paid for sex would turn me on, would be a bit of a thrill, and a different sexual experience.

Describing a desire to be desired (see below), and inverting the ageism of most participants towards their older clients, Greg said:

I think it was curiosity. I guess there was a thrill in the idea of getting paid for it, somehow. I liked the idea of somebody else wanting my body. That was a turn on, particularly an older guy, I got turned on by that feeling.

He added, ‘I was watching a lot of porn, around that time, and a lot of it was based around the idea of, you know, “gay for pay”, sort of thing, and I got off on that’. Other participants also enjoyed the ‘ego boost’ of someone offering them money for sex, such as Ash, who said, ‘It was mainly the desire to feel desired’. These narratives may add further support the notion that these participants had higher levels of erotic capital (see 8.4). Relatedly, Josh said:

It doesn’t turn me on, but the thought of someone splashing their money around for me does kind of attract me. It’s a very attractive quality. Even if someone bought me dinner, I’d be like, “That’s really nice”, and I’d be—not weak at the knees, but—like, “OK, this is a good one”.

Describing his desire to experiment, Tim said, ‘It occurred as part of my experimental phase when I was a student. I’d tried various things before, and I thought, “Hmm, I wonder if getting paid for sex feels any different?”’ He added, ‘Once I’d performed the experiment, I didn’t feel a need to do it again for statistical significance. As with most of my kinks, once I’ve tried it the novelty factor is gone, and I lose interest’. Relatedly, Mike said:

A little bit, because I wanted to try something new. A little bit, because I thought the idea of being paid for sex was kind of hot, but I wasn’t sure about it. And I guess the money as well—it was quite a substantial amount of money.

Asked whether he did ‘find it hot being paid’, Mike added, ‘No, I don’t think so, because the nice thing about sex is that you really fancy the person, and you’re into them, so I think I

would have to be attracted to them’. Suggesting that incidental sex work was a form of experimentation was more common among the 19 participants who were paid for sex just once. For example, Michael said, ‘I only did it once. It was more of an experiment’, and Daniel said, ‘It was a single sexual experience that I got paid for. I didn’t feel a need to do it again after that’. Referring to the persistence of his client, Dan said:

Well, he was begging to meet me, so I thought, “Why not?” It’s only an hour of my time, and that money can be put towards something. He’s discreet, he’s not even out, and it’s a one-time thing, so why not?

Once these participants had experimented with selling sex, they had little interest in doing so again. Although most framed their experiences in positive terms, others decided that once was enough because they did not enjoy the experience.

7.4 Exploitation Narratives

In previous chapters, I have highlighted how a dominant discourse of sex work is that it represents an inherently ‘exploitative’ social problem (see Chapters One and Two). Several participants not only challenged this perspective, but used their own experiences to disrupt or even reverse *exploitation narratives* (Scoular et al., 2009; Weitzer, 2009). For example, Will said, ‘It’s not about being used, it’s about *using them*. You’re the one in control. That’s why it doesn’t make sense to associate selling sex with exploitation, because you’re the one setting the rules’ (original emphasis). Similarly, Michael said:

Some people have asked me, “Do you think they’re taking advantage of you?” Because that’s the stereotype—that people who are selling sex are being *used* by those who are paying—but I think it’s the other way around... If anything I feel slightly guilty that I’m taking advantage of these men who either want to, or have to, pay to be with someone...With their consent obviously (original emphasis).

Expressing concern about his potential to exploit clients who were disabled, Ryan said:

I knew he didn’t have any mental health problems, or anything like that, because that would be exploiting him. He was sound of mind, he was a social worker, I could tell from the way he communicated, there was no problem, and that it was just a sexual thing for him.

Relatedly, framing incidental sex work as ‘taking money’ away from clients, Gary said:

I don’t know if I could do it again. I think I’m getting too old to be taking money off people, and I don’t need the money. I have a job, I have my own money, I don’t see why I should have to take other people’s.

Gary’s comment highlights how this perspective may be informed by the relative economic stability of these participants, where economic motivations were less about ‘need’ and more about ‘opportunity’ (see above). Nonetheless, no participants considered themselves as being ‘exploited’, ‘taken advantage of’, or ‘used’, and such language was only used to describe the clients.

Despite inverting the dominant exploitation discourse, a complicating factor in these narratives is that some participants also justified their ‘exploitation’ of clients by referring to broader social inequalities. For example, referring to the notion of *generational inequality* (see 3.2.1), Robin said:

There’s always some kind of power dynamic. I mean, including when it’s free sex... So, yeah, the dynamic was that I was a student who could be lured over for £100, and he was a man in his forties who could afford to spend £100. I think he had a £30-40,000 sort of salary.

Asked if he could see himself doing it again, Robin added:

I think there’s a certain pull factor of, “I’m young and pretty, give me some money”. There’s also a certain thing of, our generation have been fucked over financially. We’re not going to own houses, so I don’t really feel bad for extorting money from older people.

Another form of social inequality which was thought to justify ‘exploiting’ older white men centred around the theme of racism (see 5.7). For example, Will said:

Obviously, as a black person who experiences being fetishized by white men, I thought, “I hate white men, they do all this kind of shit, so why don’t I get something out of being fetishized by them? Why don’t I?” For me, my thinking was, relationship-wise, in a romantic sense, I don’t enjoy being fucked by white men. The only value white men have to me is monetary, so, I thought, “Why not get some benefits from being fetishized, from having sex with them, by getting paid for it?”

Asked if this race fetishization was evident in conversations with his clients, Will added:

Yeah, it's stupid shit, like they'll say, "Oh, you're my first", or "I love the colour of your skin". Thing is, I used that to my advantage, because I knew that my being black would help in getting them to pay. Even mentions of the size of my dick, or that kind of stuff, was evident in quick interactions with them.

Similarly, Jeremy said, 'About half of the guys who paid me asked to see dick pics, first, and you know *exactly* what they were looking for' (original emphasis), and George said, 'I think that [being black] played a humongous part in it. I think he had a weird fetish about people's skin colour'. Also critical of his client's xenophobic attitudes, George added:

He had a dark side to him. I say dark, I mean odd. He would sometimes say things, his views on race were quite weird, which I didn't understand. Obviously, I'm black, but anyone that was Asian or African, basically not-English, he would say things like, "You shouldn't be here. Why are you here?" Very UKIP. But he wouldn't realise he'd actually said that, out loud, and I was like, "Do you realise you just said that to me?"

As mentioned previously, Ash also routinely experienced racism based on his South Asian ethnicity on apps such as Grindr, to the extent that he thought being perceived as black (based on penis size) was preferable. When describing his incidental sex work encounters, Ash also said, 'In a way, I think if I was white, they might have paid more, only because most people tend to like their own race'. As this shows, racism was also a feature of incidental sex work encounters through the privileging of white bodies by clients, most of whom were white (Logan, 2010). As Dan commented about a client: 'He wanted to do other things, he said he wanted a threesome if I could find another white male, but I didn't have any other white males to join us... so that didn't happen'. That racism is expressed through the fetishization of some bodies, and the privileging of others, supports other research showing that ethnicity can carry an economic burden or premium in online male sex work (Logan, 2014).

7.5 Incidental Identities

Another dominant discourse in debates around commercial sex places emphasis on the *work* aspects of sex work (Weitzer, 2009). In Chapter Three, I drew on research within this paradigm to note that the term 'sex work' conveys a dual premise that exchanging sex for money can be understood as both an *erotic* and *economic* activity (see 3.2.5 and 3.4.4). Indeed, the growing popularity of the term 'sex work' as a more inclusive and pluralist label

for a diverse set of practices informed my decision to describe the behaviours of participants as forms of ‘incidental sex work’. Yet in some ways, my use of this term was imposing a label on the participants, which most of them did not readily identify with. In this section, I turn to how the participants responded to the question, ‘Would you identify with labels such as escort, rent boy, or sex worker?’ I will also explore how participants distinguished themselves from these conventional labels on the basis of ‘professionalism’, ‘regularity’, and ‘solicitation’, before turning to the role of sex work stigma and stereotypes in shaping such perspectives.

As noted, the majority of participants *did not* identify with conventional sex worker identity labels to characterise themselves or their behaviours. The most common reason given for not identifying with such labels was related to the number of times they had agreed to sell sex. For example, Matt said, ‘No, I wouldn’t identify with any of the labels, because it was an isolated incident or two’, and Tom said, ‘No, I did it once, and I’m not doing it now. It wasn’t really sex “work”. I mean, I guess it was, in that I got paid, but I wouldn’t identify with those labels’. The phrases ‘once-off’ and ‘one-time thing’ were used by 15 participants to distance themselves from sex work labels. For example, Adrian said, ‘I wouldn’t identify, no. I think because it was a one-time thing, I wouldn’t put myself under any label’, and Dan said, ‘If you only do it once, to try it out, I don’t think that really defines you as that. Not that it really matters. It’s just a label’. Even among participants who sold sex more than once, the lack of regularity with which they sold sex was used to distance themselves from such labels.

The terms ‘regularity’ or ‘regular thing’ were also used by 17 participants to disassociate themselves from sex work labels. For example, Rhys said, ‘I don’t consider it prostitution if it’s a one-time thing. But I think if you’re regularly doing it, then obviously it is. So, I wouldn’t relate myself to those [terms]’, and Josh said, ‘I feel like labelling yourself that way means you’ve done it more than once, or you do it regularly, or you’re planning on doing it regularly’. Elaborating on why regularity mattered to him, Greg said:

I remember somebody saying, ‘You do something once and it’s an experience, you do something two times and that rounds it off nicely, but if you do something three or four times, it becomes episodic’, and I didn’t really want it to become episodic.

Asked whether they would identify with any labels, Ethan said, ‘No, just because it’s not something that I do regularly’, and Amir said, ‘I wouldn’t identify with any of those labels, no. Probably because it wasn’t a regular thing, it was something that just kind of happened’.

Similarly, Jason said, ‘I wouldn’t really define it as anything, because it’s not something I do on a regular basis, it just happened’, and Sam said, ‘I’m not making it a regular thing, it just happens. It’s more of an off-the-cuff kind of thing, so I’m not actively looking to accept money for sex’. Here, the notion that incidental sex work was something that ‘just happened’ was also associated with the lack of planning and forethought which went into arranging the encounters online (see 6.2). Although the six participants who had regular clients could not position themselves this way, they did highlight how ‘few’ clients they arranged to meet (see 7.1).

As noted in Chapter Four, it was a requirement for this study that the participants did not advertise themselves as selling sex, before agreeing to engage in incidental sex work. As such, it was unsurprising that 11 participants mentioned their lack of ‘advertising’ or ‘soliciting’ as a reason they did not identify with conventional labels. For example, Gary said, ‘I feel that an escort advertises themselves, as someone who wants money for sex, whereas... I don’t advertise myself for sex’, Niall said, ‘I never put myself out there, I never advertised as a sex worker. I guess I escorted once, and nothing came of it, so that’s it’, and Sam said, ‘I’ve never felt the need to advertise’. Going into more detail, Josh said:

I don’t identify with the word prostitute, because to me that is something different. Prostitution is solicitation, and I never solicit, I don’t have adverts, I don’t actively message people saying, “C’mon, I’ve got a special offer, two blow-jobs and a rim-job for twenty quid!” ...I’ve never advertised what I do. I’ve never written it on my Grindr profile, or had the cues that are there.

Relatedly, Trevor said, ‘I’ve never tried to advertise it, I’ve never put a pound sign in my profile, or whatever. I have sometimes put on my Grindr profile, “I’ll blow you”, or something like that, but I’ve never asked for money’, and Dean said, ‘I wouldn’t advertise on those websites, I wouldn’t say, “I have sex for money” anywhere like that’. The visual and textual ‘cues’ referred to by Josh and Trevor have been described elsewhere (Sanders et al., 2017), as a way for professional sex workers to advertise services on platforms which attempt to ban solicitation. These responses may also reflect a folk understanding of the current law in England in Wales, which does prohibit solicitation, something which I explore in further detail towards the end of this chapter (see 7.8).

Connecting with the themes of advertising and regularity, 8 participants distinguished themselves from conventional sex worker labels on the grounds that their activities were

distinct from ‘professional’ sex work, viewed as a job or career. For example, linking regularity with professionalism, Peter said, ‘I think those terms apply to somebody who does it regularly, as a career choice, rather than incidentally’, and Alfie said, ‘No, because it isn’t really a profession, it was just a one-off encounter’. Problematising the label used for this study, Alex said:

Incidental sex worker is a term you could use. But, as I don’t see this as a regular part of my life, I don’t see any need to give it a name. Just like you wouldn’t really give a name to somebody who did people’s nails every now and again, or if you did people’s hair every now and again, you wouldn’t call yourself an incidental hairdresser. It’s just a thing that you do.

Contrasting incidental sex work with more professional forms of labour, Connor also said:

I don’t do it seriously enough to see it as a label. It’s not my day job. I work in a restaurant, I’m a waiter, so that’s something I get paid to do regularly. But I haven’t done it enough times, and I don’t see myself as a sex worker, or an escort.

Such responses were often related to the economic significance of selling sex, as a primary or significant source of income, which it was not for most of the participants (see 7.2). For example, Rick said, ‘I can’t imagine in what context I would adopt that identity, sex worker. It’s not really relevant, because what I was doing was... not the same as people who consider it their only, or main source of income’, Blake said, ‘To me, a sex worker is someone whose sole job, and their sole source of income, is having sex with people’, and Adam said, ‘No, because I don’t do it on a regular basis, I don’t class it as a source of income’.

Even among the 3 participants who *did* identify with labels such as sex worker, on some level, they were cautious to distance themselves from those who were more ‘professional’. For example, although he did identify with the label sex worker ‘to a certain extent’, Robin said:

The thing is, for me, it’s been a part-time thing, I’ve had another job, it’s not something I’ve actively pursued. I do feel a level of solidarity with them, you know, but compared to someone where that is their only job, I’ve only done it a little bit.

Also expressing solidarity with ‘professional’ sex workers, some of whom he counted among his friends, Hari said, ‘I think you have to earn a label like that, in a way. I only did it twice...

It would almost be wrong to say that I was one of them, because some people do it much more'. These responses add further support to the themes above, as reasons why participants did not (fully) identify with such labels. Several participants offered their own suggestions for how their behaviours could be labelled. For example, Tim said:

In medicine, for homosexuality, we say "men who have sex with men", which is pretty much the broadest brush you can throw, so "men who have sex with money?" Yeah, I think that's as broad as you can get. It's not a particularly snappy title. I'm not sure. It doesn't really roll off the tongue.

Asked what they would call their encounters, Dan said, 'It was a sexual experience, that I got paid for', Richard said, 'I would pretty much label it as an experimental experience', Alex said, 'I'm a substitute prostitute', and Josh said, 'It's payment for pleasure, rather than prostitution'. In these examples, participants tended to place emphasis on *behaviour* rather than *identity*, suggesting a limitation of sexual identity politics for narrowing discourses, a topic I will return to in Chapter Eight.

7.6 Stigma and Stereotypes

Another reason that participants may have avoided using conventional sex work labels was related to their perceptions of selling sex—professionally, regularly, and in particular ways—as highly stigmatised. In the narratives above, one factor which indicated this was their disavowal of the term 'prostitute', even though I never used it during the interviews (unless they had). In particular, the terms 'prostitute', 'rent boy', and 'whore' were associated with a 'lower class' and 'less respected' social identity, which most participants wanted to distance themselves from. For example, Henry said, 'No, I'm not a prostitute, or a whore, or a rent boy, they all just sound so low', and Brandon said, 'Rent boy is the worst one, to be honest. I don't like the idea of it... being for rent, I take issue with that. As I said before, I have an issue with people taking ownership of other people'. Explaining why he disliked the term, Josh said, '*Rent boy*, I don't like that. You rent a house. It's like you're renting a space, renting a space in them, saying, "Can I rent your arse out for an hour please?" Rent makes me think of a space' (original emphasis), and Peter said:

I think "rent boy" definitely has a lot of connotations. Like, I know rent boys, they do it as an industry, they do it, they seek it out because it's their form of income. Same

with sex worker, same with prostitute. Incidentally being paid for sex, I don't come from the same category.

By contrast with these labels, the term 'escort' was more favoured by participants because of its association with a more 'classy' or 'sophisticated' type of sex work. For example, Josh said, 'I'm an expensive, classy hooker. Gotta be classy, and expensive'. Distinguishing between 'escorts' and 'rent boys', Jacob said:

A rent boy is literally a male whore. You pay them for sex, that's it. Whereas, I always think of an escort as the type of person who you would willingly bring to a big business dinner, have them sit with you, because they are a bit more attractive on the eyes.

Relatedly, contrasting 'escorting' with 'prostitution' Josh said, 'Whereas, with prostitution, I just think of sex. They're just a body lying there to be fucked, male or female'. Relating such stereotypes to sexual roles (see 6.4), he added:

This may sound really stereotypical, but I always think, if it's a male prostitute, I never think of them being the top. I always think of them as the bottom, because they're being paid, they're going to do what they're told to do... I don't know why, but with prostitution, I just think of a dead body lying there getting fucked.

Such stigma was also associated with stereotypes about particular 'types' of sex work. For example, Scott said, 'It made me feel like I should be on the street corner, essentially', and Freddy said:

You think of people working on the street corner, the red-light district. You think of webcam shows, rent boy websites, stuff like that. You don't think of a 19-year-old boy on Grindr meeting two random people for £20 and £50. That wouldn't be the first port of call, if you ever said, "Think of a sex worker".

Derogatory attitudes towards these labels (or forms of sex work) also led some participants to frame their overall experience of selling sex in negative terms, using words such as 'dirty' or 'seedy', despite the sex acts themselves being thought of as 'normal' (see 6.8). As Scott said, 'It just didn't feel right. It made me feel a bit disposable, a bit used, and cheap, I suppose'. Asked why he felt his way, he added, 'I don't want to be constantly judging myself, essentially for something that lasted less than half-an-hour, thinking for days on end about why I did it, beating myself up' (see below). Similarly, Ethan said, 'There's a very

stigmatised view on selling sex, and sex workers, and prostitution, and escort work. Just because it's predominantly viewed as undesirable, dirty, people often associate prostitutes and escorts with drug users, and generally undesirable lifestyles'. Others associated selling sex (in general) with the stigma associated with promiscuity, again demonstrating the significance of Rubin's (1984) charmed circle and outer limits for demonstrating intersections of sexual oppression. For example, Amir said, 'I was a bit of a skank, but I don't think I was like a rent boy', and Dean said, 'If you say, "I charge for sex", that puts people off you, it makes them think less of you, or think you're some kind of slag'. He added, 'I wouldn't chat about people I've had sex with, like 50-year-old men... It might affect the way certain friends think of me. I definitely wouldn't tell them I'd been paid'. Alongside fearing that it would influence how others thought of them, several participants suggested that selling sex made them think of themselves in negative terms.

In Chapter Five, I noted how some participants recognised that they may have 'internalised' some homophobic or heteronormative attitudes from their families. Although, they tended to be less self-aware of internalising stigma about sex work, several participants were also reflective about this. For example, Nate said, 'Even though it's called "the oldest profession", there's a massive stigma attached to it, in society. So, I think knowing that people would judge [you]... makes you judge yourself, to a certain degree'. He added:

I think there's a lot of misunderstanding, and when it comes to judging it, I think people either tend to err on the side of sympathy to the point of condescension, where it's like, "You must have had daddy issues, your parents can't have loved you... all that kind of shit, and that's bullshit—I had a very comfortable upbringing, my parents were the coolest parents ever... So, I don't think there needs to be that kind of sympathy or condescension—or the other way they'll go is to just see you as the scum of the earth, basically.

Relatedly, Marcus said, 'I think when you're younger, you look at it with the law, the way it is, and you look at it as wrong', and Peter said:

I've become less ignorant about the sex worker industry, I've grown to appreciate that it is a valid form of income for some people. Obviously, I didn't feel fantastic about it for about a year or so, but I've liberalized about it.

He added, 'My dad is not the most politically correct person, so I grew up in a family with a fairly negative view of prostitution, and there is a general societal bias against it, which I had

inadvertently subscribed to'. Similarly, Brandon said, 'I remember reading some very judgemental posts on Twitter... There was all of this judgement, which I took on myself'. He added, 'I think having had that experience has made me less judgmental, in general... I just don't pass judgement on anyone'. Therefore, while the participants gave clear arguments for why they did not identify with labels such as 'sex worker', including the lack of regularity and professionalism associated with their behaviours, another reason for seeking to avoid labels may be based on internalised stereotypes, sexual stigma, and fear of being judged by others.

7.7 Secrecy and Surveillance

Associated with the sex work stigma which some participants had internalised were privacy concerns about other people learning that they had agreed to sell sex. Supporting this, 12 participants said that I was the only person they had disclosed information to about their incidental sex work encounters. For example, when asked, 'Have you told anyone else about being paid for sex?', Nate said, 'No one knows, apart from you now', Peter said, 'No one, apart from you. I haven't told another person', and Jeremy said, 'No, just you. And the rest of the world, now!' Similarly, Gary said, 'No, nobody knows... It's very private. I wouldn't want anybody to think that I had taken money off somebody for sex'. He added:

If anybody knew, they would probably think that it was quite low, to go to somebody, and they'd probably say, "Well, why didn't you come to me, and ask me to borrow some money?" Just no, I would prefer for nobody to know.

Although he had told some friends about his webcamming (see 6.6), Blake said:

I've told people, when I've been drunk, about using Skype. Nobody else knows about the other times, and believe me, I am an open book. I will tell absolutely anyone, absolutely anything, to the point where they freak out, but I have never told anyone about this.

Illustrating how secrecy driven by sexual stigma can be a barrier to accessing healthcare, Ash said:

Other than you, the only people I've told are at the STI clinic... They asked the question, they filled out some forms, and I feel like because it's confidential, and maybe it's important for your health, I'm not going to compromise my health just so

that they don't think I'm disgusting. Actually, I'm really scared whenever I have an Asian doctor, because I'm afraid they might be homophobic (see 5.4).

A further 23 participants had only disclosed to one or two close friends or family members. For example, Ryan said, 'My housemate knows, and my sister. I told her that I've done it, just because I tell her everything. I'm a very open book', Ethan said, 'Yes, my sister, my cousin, and my best friend', and Tom said, 'I've only truthfully shared this with you and one other person... My best friend'. Asked about her response, Tom added, 'She just hugged me, she's lovely. We talked about it. It's kind of a joke now, if I'm meeting someone, she'll say, "Is he paying?"', and I'm like, "Shut up". Similarly, Marcus said:

It's just my best friend. I did not tell *anybody else*. I mean, you feel like there's some shame behind it, weirdly enough, because you think, "Oh my God, what would your friends think" if you told them. They might laugh about it, but you don't know what they could be thinking (original emphasis)

Although several participants disclosed to younger (usually female) members of their family, including cousins and siblings, they were much more cautious about parents or grandparents finding out, expressing fears about their less open-minded perspectives on sexuality (see 5.4). Other participants were open about their experiences with larger groups of friends. For example, Kevin said, 'My mates know, actually... We just laugh about it', Nick said, 'Most of my friends know... They're totally fine with it', and Alex said:

My close friends, my circle of friends, maybe about 20 people. My flatmates know that I've done it, had oral with another guy for money, and we laugh at it now. I even told them that I'm getting spanked for £60, and my friend who's a straight guy asked if I could give him his number! It's great money, for just sitting there and getting tapped.

Similarly, Blake said:

Friends at parties and people that I'm close to. I told my ex-partner when I was drunk, and found out that he had done it, too! I don't have too many gay friends, but I feel like if I had more gay friends, I would tell them.

Having more gay friends was also associated with making disclosure easier. For example, Hari said, 'All my close friends know. Things like that aren't a big deal in my friendship group... A few of my friends are full-time, professional sex workers, so they obviously don't

think it's a big deal'. He added, 'They all think I'm a wimp, basically. I think it's just because we're quite a sexually active group... Mostly gay men'. These narratives illustrate another example of (gay) social capital, where having networks comprised of other sexual minority men provided closely-knit friendship groups which facilitated sharing (Morris, 2018).

By contrast with the narratives above, 17 participants said that they had encountered some forms of stigma after sharing with friends. Such stigma usually only came from a small handful of people in their social networks. For example, Amir said:

I don't think I would have told anyone who would be judgemental. I think the most anyone said was about me being "a little slut", but that's fine. They said it in quite a negative way, but it really doesn't offend me, because I probably am!

By comparison with Blake, when other participants disclosed to romantic partners, selling sex was perceived in terms of sexual health 'risk factors'. For example, Jaspal said of his ex-partner, 'He was a bit shocked, because there was a lot of money involved, but then he was like, "I don't see any issue with it". He asked if we used condoms and if I'd been tested, which I had'. Relatedly, Tim said of his current partner:

He didn't really approve of it, I could see the sort of "risk factors" flashing up in his head and everything. He made me get rid of the bag, you know, the satchel I bought, he made me get rid of that... I suspect because every time he looked at it, he would be reminded where it came from.

Asked why he had not told more people, Tim added, 'There is a social stigma attached to it. In the same way, I don't really advertise to my wider social network that I'm in an open relationship'. These narratives highlight how different forms of sexual stigma can overlap (Rubin, 1984), including the legacy of sexual pathology from the Medical Model (see 2.6).

In Chapter Six, I noted how webcamming (whether for free or not) was often associated with concerns about digital surveillance (see 6.6). Supporting Foucault's theory of the panoptic society, among those participants who feared social stigma for breaking with sexual norms, the mere *possibility* of their incidental sex work being discovered by others had a regulatory effect. For example, Andy said:

I remember the very first time, which was when I was paid fifty quid to perform oral sex, I was extremely nervous at the time... I remember at one point I was getting

quite jittery, through nerves, that somebody was going to walk past, and walk in on us.

On the other hand, the possibility of discovery sometimes added to the sexual ‘thrill’ of the encounter (see 7.3). For example, Josh said, ‘It was exciting being given the money. It was the thrill of being paid. What if someone finds out? What if I get caught? Not that I would, but what if I get arrested for taking his money?’ Such fears were also expressed about the digital platforms on which incidental sex work was arranged (see Boyle, 1997; Mathiesen, 1997). For example, Amir said, ‘I don’t send dick pics anymore... I had a bad experience last year, there was a Twitter account that posted nude photos of people from Grindr, and I was one of the ones on there’, and Matt said, ‘Someone did ask if they could photograph me, for money, but I said no because someone would find the pictures online, somewhere’. Sanders et al. (2017) have highlighted how online sex workers experience new forms of ‘danger’ on digital platforms, including the sharing of images or information about their work, while Grant (2014) has suggested that, whether performed by police, social services, or researchers, ‘surveillance isn’t meant to expand the public knowledge of the lives of sex workers; it’s to investigate some form of harm to the public that’s believed to originate with them’ (p. 60). It is only with the explicit consent of the participants, and an assurance of anonymity, that I have shared their stories here. However, in Chapter Eight, I will return to ethical questions raised by collecting and distributing information about an (until now) hidden population (also see 4.7). In the next section, I explore how fears about surveillance may have been compounded by lack of understanding about the law.

7.8 Misinformed (about) Laws

As indicated by Josh’s comment above, some privacy and surveillance concerns (about the police) were based on a misunderstanding of the criminal law concerning sex work. In Chapter One, I highlighted that exchanging money for sex in England and Wales remains ‘legal’, if between two consenting adults and in private: ‘As a matter of English law, prostitution is not illegal. Rather than absolute prohibition, English law has focused upon regulating specific nuisances associated with sex work’ (Ashford, 2009a, p. 264). Given that most incidental sex work is arranged privately in digital spaces (see 6.2), and never involved public advertising (see 7.5), the current law has little to no ability to intervene (for now). Yet 39 of the 50 participants incorrectly believed that, by agreeing to sell sex, they had broken the

law. For example, Alex said, ‘As far as I’m aware, the selling of sex is illegal’, Niall said, ‘I know that it’s illegal, brothels are also illegal’, and Nate said, ‘Well, I know it’s obviously illegal, and it’s illegal to organise... but I know there can be grey areas’. Given the complexity of current sex work law, most participants held a muddled view of the topic. While many were aware that brothel keeping, solicitation, and forms of sexual exploitation made some commercial sexual activities criminal, they conflated this with all forms of sex work. Returning to perceptions of ‘escorting’ as being distinct from other forms of sex work (see 7.6), Nick said, ‘My understanding of the law is that it’s illegal to be paid for sex, but it’s not illegal to be an escort, because an escort is essentially just company. Well, they say they’re “escorts”, but there are optional extras’, Brandon said, ‘I thought it was illegal, honestly. I genuinely thought it was illegal. I know there’s an understanding of escorts, I mean like expensive prostitutes, and apparently that isn’t illegal’, and George said, ‘I know it’s incredibly illegal if you have sex for money, but if you’re an escort who goes for dinner, that’s fine, that’s acceptable, no one can arrest you’. Relatedly, when asked, ‘How much do you know about the law surrounding sex work?’, Luke said, ‘Very little. I’m fairly aware that it’s not legal, but I haven’t given it any research or anything’. He added, ‘I suppose it’s not legal, because I remember reading about them creating a red-light district in Leeds’, and Ethan said:

I’m not entirely sure of it. I’m not sure if I can be arrested for what I’ve done. If I can, then I think that’s ridiculous. Someone asked me to have sex with them, and for them to pay for it. They wanted to pay for it. Why should that be illegal? I’m not robbing someone. It baffles me that it’s illegal, I just don’t understand why.

Other participants incorrectly thought that the ‘Nordic Model’ was policy in the UK, criminalising the clients, but not them. For example, Paul said, ‘As far as I’m aware, it criminalises the buyer. I’m not sure... It’s not illegal to sell sex, but it is illegal to buy sex’, and Rick said, ‘I know embarrassingly little. I mean, it’s illegal to pay for sex, or to exploit someone, like pimping. Is it illegal to pay for sex?’ He added, ‘I know it wasn’t illegal on my part, at all, but I don’t know if it’s illegal to pay for sex, or if it’s enforced’. Linking ‘laws around exploitation’ (as promoted by the Nordic Model) with stigma and stereotypes, Will said, ‘There’s less stigma now, with people who do sex work as cam models... Obviously, if you’re a cam worker it’s less oppressive than other stuff’ (see Stewart, 2016). Elaborating on how his view of the law was shaped by personal politics, Will added:

As a communist, pretty much *all work* under capitalism is exploitative, that's just the system we live in. But I don't know how to word it. We need to be pro-worker... because we are all being exploited under [capitalism]. When people are like, "Oh, I hate sex work, I hate that people have to do that", I'm like, "You work at McDonald's, for minimum wage, so drawing that conclusion doesn't make sense" (original emphasis).

Also expressing anger about the prospect of sex work criminalisation, George said, 'Yeah, fuck the politicians. If you don't want to do it, just don't pay someone'. Somewhat more knowledgeable than most of the participants about sex work law in England and Wales, Ash said, 'I know that it's illegal before 18. I think it's legal here, isn't it? You can't run a brothel here... I looked it up on Wikipedia' (see below), and Elliott said:

I looked it up, briefly, at the time. Not in any great detail, but from my limited understanding and what I can remember, I think the actual act of being paid for sex isn't illegal, but it's the soliciting. Is that what it's called? Something to do with the advertising of it.

He added, 'Well, it's your body, so as long as it's consensual, then no one really has the right, or no one should have the right to tell you what you can do with your own body'. These narratives highlighted concerns about how the law could impose on their bodily autonomy, alongside the hypocrisy of state regulation of some forms of sex or work, but not others. I will return to this topic in the final chapter.

Most participants were uninterested in what the law had to say, even if their behaviours were believed to be illegal. For example, Greg said, 'It's not something I ever really thought about. You know, he was friendly, he was polite, he was amicable... I didn't really see it as prostitute and client, sort of thing', and Freddy said:

I don't care. That's the brief answer. I knew I wouldn't be caught or anything. I didn't care about the legality... It is illegal, isn't it? I'm oblivious to it, but my view is that I don't care either way, whether it's legal or illegal, it's what I want to do.

Similarly, Connor said, 'The bad thing is I'm a law student, so I should know, but I'm not very aware and I don't really care. I have no idea, but I think it's illegal to be paid for sex. I know it's illegal to pay someone for having sex. But you can always blur the lines a bit' (see above), and Jason said, 'I'm not that aware of it. I don't know if it is legal or not. Yeah, I'm a

bad criminology student. I don't know, I don't really care much about it'. One reason that participants did not care about the law was because it was perceived as being unenforceable, comparable to other illegal activities such as consuming cannabis or streaming films online. For example, Tim said, 'When I torrent a film, I am breaking several copyright laws. I'm aware of it, I know it's bad, but the way I see it, much like copyright law, it's a bit of a silly law', Ethan said, 'It's a bit like smoking weed. How are the police going to know what you do in private, anyway?', and Nate said, 'Everyone does stuff at that age... I would smoke the odd spliff, and I was hooking up under 16'. He added, 'Well what I did was illegal anyway, given my age'. Also highlighting how the law was not something he considered relevant, Blake said, 'How are they going to get me? Unless you're an undercover policeman, in which case I feel very betrayed'. Private sexual encounters were perceived as being difficult or impossible for the state to regulate, so there was little concern about the law.

As noted in Chapter Two, the age of sexual consent (for heterosexuals) was raised to 16 by the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, which also intensified the criminalisation of both homosexuality and prostitution. For sexual minority men, an age of consent was introduced at 21 by the Sexual Offences Act, 1967, but not lowered to 16 until the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2000. As Waites (2005) has noted:

Age of consent laws in the UK have been fiercely contested and (especially in England and Wales) fundamentally reformed in recent years. During the 1990s, equalisation of the "gay age of consent" became a major issue in national politics (p.3).

This debate was highlighted by several participants, who suggested that age of consent laws were as unenforceable *and* incorrect as laws prohibiting sex work. Overall, 27 of the 50 participants first had sex below the age of 16, while 13 engaged in incidental sex work below the age of 18. For example, describing his only incidental sex work encounter, Josh said:

Well, I'd been on Grindr, which I obviously shouldn't have been on, because I was 17 at the time, but I feel like there are a lot of people younger than 18 who are on there, people who are even younger than I was, like 15. So, I was on Grindr and this guy popped up.

Similarly, the first of two times Hari was paid for sex was when he was 17, while the only time Jeremy was paid for sex was when he was 16. The youngest age at which any participant was paid for sex was Jacob, who said:

Well, I had met him once before. He was about 35, at the time. I was 14, at the time. I think he knew how old I was, but he played blind, he played ignorance, and we had sex for free the first time. This was via Grindr, and then the second time came around, and he messaged me, “Hey, how are you?” It was only 6 months later, and he was like, “Oh, do you remember?”, and I was like, “Yeah, I remember”, and he was like, “I really enjoyed last time, I’d like to meet you again, but I’d like to pay you”. I thought, “OK, this is new, this is interesting”, and I said, “OK, how much?”, and he said “£50”. Fifty quid for a 14-year-old, at that time, was loads of money, I would be minted. So, we met up.

Although Jacob enjoyed the sex less the second time, because it ‘felt less emotional’ (see 6.7 for discussion of how emotional connectivity influenced participants’ enjoyment of incidental sex work), none of the participants who engaged in underage sex framed their experiences in terms of ‘abuse’, ‘exploitation’, or ‘statutory rape’. Given that most participants were having sex aged thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen, many routinely so (see 5.8), laws which treat paid sexual encounters differently from unpaid sexual encounters seemed counterintuitive to most. As Andy and Ben said, such laws are ‘pointless’. Although sexual assault can be a distressing social problem (see 4.7 for discussion of how such issues were addressed during the ethical review for this study), these results provide further empirical support for Bainham and Brooks-Gordon’s (2004) claim that the Sexual Offences Act, 2003, ‘casts the net so wide that it would criminalize many actions that are not overtly or uncontroversially harmful... It would, moreover, criminalize many of those who will lack any subjective appreciation that they are acting unlawfully or even unwisely’ (p. 268).

Chapter Eight:

Queer Conclusions and Policy Proposals

8.1 Shifting Social Attitudes Towards Sexuality

Throughout this thesis I have drawn attention to the ways in which social attitudes towards gender, sex, and sexuality have shifted over time. In particular, the cultural construction of some behaviours and identities as ‘criminal’, ‘immoral’, ‘deviant’, ‘pathological’, or ‘victimised’, and others as ‘healthy’, ‘natural’, and ‘normal’—or *normative*—has connected sexual minority men and women who sell sex, at least since the Victorian period (see 2.2; Rubin, 1984). This discursive framing of some sexualities as more virtuous than others has consequences even within sexual minority groups, where differences between individuals based on class, ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics mark some as ‘lesser’ than others. This was evidenced by how many participants in this study were more comfortable using the label ‘escort’ than ‘rent boy’ to characterise their incidental sex work behaviours, at least partly because the former label was considered more ‘classy’ and ‘respectable’ (see 7.6; Sanders, 2008). Relatedly, those participants who had worse experiences of coming out as ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’, or ‘queer’ tended to be from more religious or rural communities (see 5.4), where the pressure to ‘be normal’ was more pronounced. Again, this was associated with sex negativity (see 5.5) and class positionality (see 5.6). In these examples, several participants described themselves as having ‘internalised’ a normative belief system, supporting postmodern theories of class hegemony, sexual normativity, and symbolic violence (see Chapter Three; Bourdieu, 1977; Gramsci, 1971; Foucault, 1978). Another important inequality which emerged through analysis of the interviews was how the participants of colour experienced racism not only in their casual sexual encounters (see 5.7), but also in their commercial sexual encounters (see 7.4), where it was suggested that aspects of their ethnicity were either ‘fetishized’ or something which had to be ‘compensated for’ (Logan, 2010). Thus, a recurring theme of this thesis was how inequalities continued to shape the experiences of sexual minority men who sold sex incidentally.

Corroborating this theme, most of the participants who identified as white and middle-class had few—if any—problems in coming out as sexual minorities (see 5.3) or engaging in causal and commercial sex (see Mowlabocus, 2010). Perhaps the clearest example of changing

social attitudes towards sexuality has been the declining influence of homophobia (Clements and Field, 2014; Weeks, 2007), especially among younger generations (Risman, 2018; Savin-Williams, 2005). While the HIV/AIDS epidemic intensified sex negativity towards sexual minority men and sex workers during the 1980s (see 2.6), social attitudes in England and Wales have changed considerably and consistently across the lifetimes of the participants in this study. Things have improved so much that some sexual minority young men's coming out experiences, friendship networks, and visible gay identities can now be interpreted as forms of cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Morris, 2018). Supporting this, 31 of the 50 participants said that they had never experienced overt forms of homophobia. Yet Rubin's (1984) theory of the 'charmed circle' and 'outer limits' of sexual morality (see 3.4.2) remains a powerful tool for understanding why social 'progress' has been more permissible for some groups (e.g. white middle-class gay men), and less so for others (e.g. black working-class sex workers). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to reformulate or update Rubin's (1984) model, the evidence presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven illustrate elements of continuity and change concerning attitudes towards casual, commercial, homosexual, and cross-generational sex in the twenty-first century.

Part of this changing cultural landscape has been attributed to the effectiveness of *identity politics* for securing greater social recognition and legal rights for sexual minorities (Weeks, 2007). However, as postmodern feminist and queer theorists have critiqued, this 'social progress' has been achieved through the adoption of dominant discourses or metanarratives of individual responsibility and public respectability, i.e. neoliberalism (Chateauvert, 2013). Such forms of 'respectability' can only be achieved through the exclusion of others who deviate from norms of economic productivity, monogamy, and nationalism (Duggan, 1992; Puar, 2013; Stychin, 1998), as illustrated by the successful legal campaigns for marriage and military participation, or against workplace discrimination and hate crimes (see Lamble, 2013 for a critique of gender and sexual minorities embracing an expansion of the 'carceral state' through hate crime legislation). Those who belong to (homo)normative relationships, support the maintenance of national borders, and contribute to the economy in the 'right' ways are celebrated, while those who have non-normative relationships, oppose the policing of borders, or contribute to the economy in the 'wrong' ways (i.e. sex work) remain unrecognised and unprotected by the status quo (Smith and Mac, 2018). Intersectional feminist scholarship further contributes to this analysis (see 3.3.2), by highlighting how rights-based movements for sexual liberalism have positioned themselves as compatible with both class

inequality and white nationalism (Adler, 2018; Grant, 2014; Puar, 2013). In other words, the distinction between the ‘good gay’ and ‘bad queer’ has been bolstered by a neoliberal, rights-based emphasis on individualism and identity (Stychin, 1998).

During periods of political change—or moments of hegemony—it does become possible to influence the direction of travel in more inclusive ways (Rubin and Butler, 1994). One way in which the hegemony of identity politics, as the ‘best’ or ‘only’ way to change society, has been challenged is by the emergence of a post-closet, post-gay, post-identity culture (Dean, 2013; Ghaziani, 2014; Savin-Williams, 2013), where coming out as a sexual minority is thought of as less important or necessary than it has in the past (see 5.3; Plummer, 1995). If the significance of sexual identity politics has begun to wane, this will also have implications for sex worker rights movements (see below and 1.2). It may also indicate part of the reason that the participants of this study did not identify with conventional sex worker labels (see 7.5).

As noted in Chapter Five, 35 of the 50 participants held a more ‘fluid’ or ‘open’ view of sexuality as something that cannot be narrowly defined by one’s sexual behaviours (see 5.1). Similarly, when discussing their sexual ‘roles’, a range of behaviours/identities were described by participants such as ‘topping’ (or being a ‘top’), ‘bottoming’ (or being a ‘bottom’), and being ‘versatile’ (see 6.4), alongside kinky sexual roles such as ‘subbing’ (or being a ‘submissive’), ‘domming’ (or being a ‘dominant’), and being a ‘switch’ (see 6.5). In both examples, the boundaries between behaviour (as expressed by verbs) and identity (as expressed by nouns) became blurred. In some ways, these perspectives support the view held by almost all participants that selling sex incidentally, as a behaviour, was not regular or professional enough to label them ‘sex workers’ (see 7.5). This perspective was not far removed from Wardlaw’s (1842) view under the Moral Model (see 2.2) that the term ‘prostitution’ should not be applied to ‘a solitary act’, but rather ‘the voluntary *repetition of the act*’ (p. 15, original emphasis). That the narratives of participants in this study support such a definition (almost 175 years later) raises further questions concerning the criminal law, which has traditionally been understood as a mechanism for regulating sexual (and other) *behaviours* rather than *identities*.

Queer legal scholarship has challenged this view of behaviour as distinct from identity, highlighting how the law constructs deviant groups through (discursive and disciplinary) processes of criminalisation, examination, and surveillance (Ashford, 2009b; Stychin, 1998). For example, Moran (1995) has argued that the 1957 Wolfenden Report had to define the

meaning of ‘homosexuality’, in order to introduce prohibitions on ‘homosexual offences’, which could then frame ‘homosexual acts’ (in private) as beyond the purview of the law:

The term “homosexual” in the phrase “homosexual offences” is in the Wolfenden review a reference to technologies of examination, schemes of classification, and projects of management and eradication... devices through which homosexuality might be spoken about and induced to speak for itself within various practices of the law (p. 21).

By naming homosexuality through such processes, the committee’s recommendations for some sex acts to be decriminalised (in private spaces) created new forms of criminalisation (in public spaces). As noted in Chapter Two, legislation passed following the Wolfenden report, including the Street Offences Act (1959) and Sexual Offences Act (1967), increased the number of arrests made for both ‘street prostitution’ (O’Neill, 2010) and ‘homosexual offences’ (Cocks, 2006). This mirrors Foucault’s (1978) observation that removing the death penalty for ‘sodomy’, a form of *sovereign power* (‘the right to take life or let live’), increased the number of people arrested, incarcerated, and normatively judged due to the introduction of ‘lesser’ offences (e.g. gross indecency), a form of *biopower* (‘positive influence over life, that attempts to administer, optimise and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and regulations’). Turning to sex work, current policy proposals appear to be similarly focused on the (contradictory) premise of ‘decriminalising’ those who sell sex while ‘criminalising’ their clients, further expanding the reach of the carceral state. Furthermore, while the distinction between public/private spaces emphasised by the classical liberalism of the Wolfenden Report remain in place (e.g. Sexual Offences Act, 2003), the distinction between public/private space has become more difficult to define given the expansion of digital media (Ashford, 2008; Mowlabocus, 2010; this study).

8.2 The Politics of (Partial) Prohibition

In the introduction to this thesis I noted how MPs across the political spectrum continue to conflate voluntary sex work with coercive sexual exploitation. Such narratives narrowly define sex work as a form of sexual ‘abuse’, ‘violence’, or ‘slavery’ (Weitzer, 2009). Much as the police officers who raided a ‘gay brothel’ on my street sought to ‘send a clear message’ that sex work would not be tolerated in ‘our’ community (see 1.1), in Parliament I heard MPs agree that ‘it starts with the law sending a clear signal’ (Gavin Shuker, Labour) and ‘the law has to send a clear message that it is never acceptable’ (Sarah Champion, Labour). Others

suggested that ‘to begin to tackle this problem it is essential to educate young men and boys’ (Angela Crawley, SNP), or criminalise the men who pay for sex to ‘reduce demand for sexual exploitation, change public attitudes, and make countries more hostile destinations for traffickers’ (Ronnie Cowan, SNP). Pointing to other countries where such ‘sex buyer laws’ already exist, it was noted that: ‘The culture has been changed in Sweden’ (Fiona Bruce, Conservative) and ‘The change that we have had in Northern Ireland is needed [in] England and Wales’ (Jim Shannon, DUP). As these comments highlight, politicians of many stripes support the (partial) criminalisation of commercial sex not only to reduce a seemingly—individual, social, and symbolic—‘unmitigated horror’, but also to change cultural norms and shift public attitudes through the promotion of a moral panic (see Rubin, 1984; Vance, 1984).

As I suggested previously, such neo-abolitionists or neo-prohibitionists have (rather disingenuously) adopted many of the same slogans and strategies as the sex worker rights movement, including those protestors I joined in opposition to the terms of their debate on Parliament Square (see 1.3). For example, elaborating on how and why she wanted to ‘send a clear message’, Sarah Champion added:

To do that, the Government should urgently extend the existing prohibition against paying for sex in a public space to make it a criminal offence in all locations. At the same time, it is vital that people exploited through prostitution are not criminalised, but instead supported to exit prostitution and access the services they need. As a result, penalties for loitering and soliciting should be removed from the statute book.

In the context of a debate which focused on the role of internet technologies, ‘all locations’ here includes digital spaces. Not only does this focus on ‘private spaces’ and ‘digital spaces’ seek to overturn the law’s current emphasis on ‘public spaces’ and ‘public order’ (since Wolfenden), but it shares striking similarities in attempting to criminalise/decriminalise simultaneously (Moran, 1995). As Jim Shannon (DUP) said, not only has the ‘sex buyer law’ in Northern Ireland increased the number of arrests and convictions of clients since 2015, but current law in England and Wales ‘has limitations because it can address only those who seek to purchase sex in a public place, yet research suggests that the majority of prostitution in the UK now happens indoors’. In May 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, of which most MPs named above are members, published an ‘inquiry’ titled *Behind Closed Doors: Organised Sexual Exploitation in England and Wales*.

Highlighting how the internet was central to this drive for regulatory reform, Gavin Shuker's foreword said:

Technology is changing every aspect of our lives. But in the world of prostitution, it has directly led to phenomenon of 'pop up' brothels; disrupting patterns that have stood for years. In short, the internet is changing the way that sex is sold, leading to fresh models of exploitation... A handful of explicit prostitution procurement websites enable this trade, making sizeable profits, directly benefitting from the exploitation of others.

In response, members of the Sex Work Research Hub signed a letter critiquing the report's 'biased approach', 'conflation of sex work and exploitation' and 'lack of self-reflexivity':

Its self-fulfilling research questions and findings cannot be regarded as a credible and authoritative basis for policymaking on the complex relationship between sex work and sexual exploitation... As a result of its inbuilt bias, the report and its policy recommendations read like a teleological short circuit within which leading questions are asked and answered according to a politicised understanding (of sex work as coinciding with sexual exploitation) that is not corroborated by the current state of the art research in the UK and globally.

As a signatory to this letter, I supported the critique that a growing body of empirical research with and by sex workers shows that the Nordic Model is harmful to their rights and safety (e.g. Vuolajärvi, 2018). However, this raises the question of what should be current sex work policy in England and Wales, instead?

When I first began studying sex work at an academic level, it was as an undergraduate student of Politics and Philosophy, where my dissertation thesis explored *The Political Philosophy of Prostitution*. Here, I held a significantly more 'liberal' or 'modernist' perspective on the question of policy, suggesting that a rights-based framework could adequately address the injustices of criminalisation, inequality, and stigma. For example, I drew on Kant's premise of treating people as ends in themselves, Mill's harm principle, Nozick's critique of state interventionism, and Rawls' conception of justice as fairness—radically different conceptualisations of liberalism—alongside Nussbaum's arguments that all forms of liberalism share a commitment to the equal moral value of individuals (see 3.2.5)—to defend the proposition that sex work should be 'legalised'. However, as Smith and Mac (2018) note:

Be wary of liberalism. It is not enough to consider yourself an ally of sex workers if your politics remain a mere defence of ‘equality and respect’ or the freedom ‘to do with one’s body as one wishes’. Not that there is anything objectionable about ideas like this. In homes and workplaces, benign rhetoric about stigmatised and outcast groups being ‘just like everyone else’ can be an effective antidote to social ostracism (p. 215).

Rather, they argue it is necessary to address both the *symbolic* and *material* conditions of inequality which perpetuate problems including (but not limited to) sexual violence, stigma, and stereotypes. The best available model for this, which the overwhelming majority of current sex workers support, is full *decriminalisation* rather than *legalisation* (see 1.2 and 1.3). Legalisation (or partial prohibition) is problematic because it seeks to define what forms of sex work are ‘good’, and which are ‘bad’, and thus relegated to the outer limits (Grant, 2014; Rubin, 1984). Incidental sex work further challenges almost any regulatory approach given that even when the participants did engage in illegal behaviours, or incorrectly thought that they did, the law was framed as ‘pointless’, ‘harmful’, or ‘impossible’ to police (see 7.8). This thesis adds support to the (more anarchist than liberal) perspective that digital spaces exist beyond the state’s ability to regulate, creating opportunities for sexual minorities to express themselves and arrange encounters which are not bound by (normative) aspects of the criminal law (Ashford, 2008; Mowlabocus, 2010).

8.3 Discourses of Despair (Victimisation, Violence, Vulnerability)

Having adopted postmodern perspectives on class, gender, and sexuality in this thesis (e.g. Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; Sedgwick, 1990), a central focus has been on the role of *dominant discourses*, or ways of ‘telling stories’ (Plummer, 1995), which limit what can be thought of as possible. Furthermore, narratives of victimisation (e.g. social stigma), violence (e.g. hate crimes), and vulnerability (e.g. drug dependency) remain dominant frames of reference for both sex workers and sexual minority men in the media, policy debates, and research literature. Providing a clear example of how the repetition of such narratives may (inadvertently) harm those they claim to support or represent, Jobe (2008) has highlighted how the ‘truth’ of sexual trafficking asylum claims are interpreted by the Home Office ‘in relation to wider cultural understandings around sexual trafficking, violence, sexuality and gender roles’ (p. 70):

Trafficked women's accounts were therefore often understood as credible accounts in relation to, and as part of, wider discursive understandings around sexual trafficking, prostitution, and violence against women, which frequently appear in wider media representations, research and literature (p. 72).

Given that the perspectives of 'policy makers, journalists, project workers, academics, and other social researchers' contribute to creating discourses of sexual exploitation, those seeking asylum are confronted by rigid binaries of public/private, perpetrator/victim, and agency/coercion, where 'too much agency and the account is often considered incredible as the woman can no longer be considered to be a "victim"' (p. 75). By extension, the ways in which such narratives are framed in gendered terms—exclusively as a form of 'violence against women and girls'—makes it difficult, if not impossible, to imagine men as anything other than oppressors in public discussions of sex work. On this topic, Agustin (2006) notes that:

This position advocates for a discursive change among feminists that would make 'prostitution' by definition a form of violence against women, with issues of women's possible 'consent' being removed from any consideration. Similarly issues of migration and commercial sex are fused... so that all people who help migrants become 'traffickers', including family, friends, lovers, agents and entrepreneurs, and all kinds of help become 'trafficking'. This project is fully gendered, so that both the presence of women among 'traffickers' and male migrants who sell sex are both ignored (pp. 129-30).

From a different feminist perspective, it is disappointing that such discourses of sex and work, rooted in a nineteenth century understanding of women who sell sex as vulnerable, victimised, in need of rescue—adding symbolic marginalisation to existing structural inequalities for many women, migrants, and sexual minorities—remains politically salient. This extends to discussions of commercial sex more broadly, given that voluntary sex work is so often conflated with sexual abuse, exploitation, and trafficking by activists, academics, journalists, policy makers, and others (Jobe, 2008). For example, two recurring themes during the Westminster Hall debate I attended in July were 'gendered violence' and 'the fallacy of choice', which create discursive limitations I will explore in the following sections.

Complicating my critique of the neo-abolitionist or neo-prohibitionist discourses above, there are at least two counter-narratives of commercial sex which began to gain traction under

the Liberation Model (see 2.5), either as a form of sexual empowerment or sexual labour. As Smith and Mac (2018) comment:

Empowerment is a word that comes up a lot in discussions of sex work. It is overused to the point of satire (often in media depictions of middle-class sex workers), to talk about sexual rebellion, the thrill of sudden cash, or the so-called free choice of the individual to sell sex. These flippant conversations frame having sex for money as an inherently empowering thing. This liberal perspective – that one person’s ability to profit off their own sexual objectification can magically overturn the status quo for all – leaves many feminist critics dubious (p. 217, original emphasis).

Instead, they endorse a discourse (or philosophical framing) of sex work as a form of work, not ‘like any other’, but comparable with most others: ‘we struggle with shit jobs, falling wages, and the correct suspicion that what many of us do for money all day contributes nothing of real value to our lives or communities’ (p. 40). In line with the currently dominant research framework, the Social and Economic Model (see 2.7), this perspective highlights both the *ordinary* dimensions of (sex) work to question why distinctions and value judgments are made between some forms of labour but not others (Nussbaum, 1999a), and the distinctly *feminist* dimensions of (sex) work performed by women in underpaid, undervalued, and unappreciated roles—for example, through a focus on emotional labour being a neglected form of work under a broader system of patriarchy (Hochschild and Machung, 1989).

Incidental sex work among sexual minority men does not neatly align within any of the discourses mentioned above. Arranging to sell sex in digital spaces without advertising means that legal discourses of solicitation and public impropriety do not apply. Selling sex only once, twice, or a handful of times means that rights-based discourses of repetitive labour do not apply. As young men and boys, feminist discourses of either violence against women and girls, or gendered workplace discrimination, do not apply. Because their behaviours were not ‘regular’ or ‘professional’ enough, none of the currently available labels to characterise commercial sex seemed appropriate to the participants. Even when having sex below the age of 16, or selling sex below the age of 18, discourses of abuse, coercion, or lack of consent were almost entirely absent from their narratives. If the word ‘exploitation’ was used at all, it was to reverse the current discourse. As Michael said, ‘that’s the stereotype—that people who are selling sex are being *used* by those who are paying—but I think it’s the other way around’ (original emphasis; see 7.4). The stories presented in this thesis do not conform with any

currently recognised story of sex work, something which has implications for all assumptions and generalisations made about commercial sex, including who, where, and why (see below). Furthermore, these results cannot be easily dismissed as a ‘small fringe’, given my survey of 1,473 sexual minority men aged 18-28 on Grindr found at least 14.6% said they had sold sex, 8.2% incidentally. These numbers most likely represent only a partial account of the true proportion engaging in incidental sex work given the social desirability effect, where people seek to avoid association with stigmatised stereotypes (see 7.6). As Nick (rather accurately) suggested, ‘I reckon about 40% of gay guys have been paid for sex at some point in their lives... but you probably only get around 10-15% who say so’. Indeed, if such behaviours are as commonplace as suggested, why *should* anyone say so?

8.4 Exchanging Erotic Capital for Economic Capital

Another perspective this thesis adopted is Bourdieu’s concept of the *symbolic economy* (see 3.2.3), including emerging concepts within this theoretical framework such as *erotic capital* (Hakim, 2011), *gay capital* (Morris, 2018), and *gender capital* (Bridges, 2009; Huppatz, 2012). Given the class differences between many participants and their clients (see 4.4 and 6.3), one way to frame incidental sex work could be the direct exchange of erotic capital for economic capital. As several participants suggested, the clients were sometimes characterised as using their wealth to ‘compensate’ for the lack of attraction they had towards older men. Or as Robin said, ‘I think there’s a certain pull factor of, “I’m young and pretty, give me some money”... and he was a man in his forties who could afford to spend £100’ (see 7.4). Such an analysis is further supported by the photo-elicitation procedures, where participants described their own Grindr profile photos in terms of being ‘aesthetically pleasing’, ‘attractive to look at’, and ‘body confident’, indicating a self-perception of high erotic capital (see 5.6), compared to clients who were described as ‘not very appealing’, ‘much older’ or ‘just average’ (see 6.3). While this was complicated by those who thought that their clients were ‘young enough’ and ‘hot enough’ that they did not necessarily *need* to pay for sex, there was a clear perception that most clients had less erotic capital than they did, and that age was associated with attractiveness (see Hakim, 2010). Arguably, this ageism was multidirectional, given that the clients could have fetishized the youth of many participants in this study—something indicated by the use of labels such as ‘twink’, which denotes a young-looking, hairless, ectomorphic body shape, as the participants noted (see 5.6).

Relatedly, in Chapter Five, I suggested that the ways in which participants described their own erotic capital do not align with the notion that traits associated with hegemonic masculinity (e.g. dominance and muscularity) tend to be more desired by clients. This challenges Logan's (2010) argument that more traditionally masculine online male escorts carry a higher premium. Further complicating Logan's findings, in Chapter Seven I showed how (on average) participants who were paid to 'bottom' earned roughly the same as those who were paid to 'top' (see Figure 8). Although this chart removed some outliers—i.e. those who were paid to perform the same sex acts repeatedly with the same client—it may speak to the relative ease associated with topping, rather than a higher 'demand' or 'desire' to pay for such behaviours. This compliments Walby's (2012) critique of hegemonic masculinity as a conceptual framework for understanding the economics of male sex work (see 3.3.3). Furthermore, the emphasis placed on anal sex in other male sex work research was challenged by the number of participants who were paid to perform oral sex only or paid for forms of non-penetrative sexual touching including kinky behaviours (see Walby, 2012). As I have argued elsewhere, the argument that gender capital (understood as traditional masculinity for a man, or traditional femininity for a woman) equates with erotic capital is an assumption which may not apply to sexual minorities 'given that alternative sexual scripts and gender norms often exist in queer subcultures' (Morris, 2018, p. 1188-9). This aligns with the ways in which most participants defined the word 'sex' more generally, in ways which do not conform with heteronormative expectations (see 5.8). Understanding incidental sex work as an exchange of (queer) erotic capital by young men for the economic capital of older men also raises questions about structural inequalities based on age and income (i.e. generational inequality). The theme of sexual inequalities based on age, attractiveness, body shape, ethnicity and race were highlighted several times in this thesis (see 5.7 and 7.4). Of course, one explanation for these differences in results may simply be that incidental sex work is not comparable with professional online escorting, or that cross-cultural differences (between the UK and US) result in different attitudes towards sex roles, preferences, and genders.

Having drawn attention to postmodern critiques of classical Marxism, I have sought to avoid describing the participants of this study of having any form of 'false consciousness' about their motivations for selling sex. When I have referred to issues such as 'internalised' heteronormativity or sex work stigma (see 5.5 and 7.6) this was only because (at least some of) the participants explained their narratives using this terminology. In an increasingly

reflexive culture (Giddens, 1991), it is not possible to think of research participants as unaware of their own positionality within class, gender, and sexual hierarchies. That said, when discussing their *economic motivations* for agreeing to engage in incidental sex work, most participants framed ‘the money’ as a central factor. It was not something they would have done without the financial incentives, whether to purchase ‘essential’ or ‘luxury’ goods and services (see 7.2). In part, this reflects a breakdown of traditional class identities (Savage, 2015), where the educational capital of attending university was sometimes associated with a desire or need to ‘pay off debts’, buy ‘a few drinks out’, or buy ‘a risotto maker’ from John Lewis. On the one hand, these results could be interpreted as indicative of more affluence, opportunism, and interest in consumer culture than other groups studied by sex work researchers and policy makers—which, as noted above, may be more likely to focus on ‘survival sex work’, ‘sexual trafficking’, or other conditions of ‘economic exploitation’. On the other hand, given that the class identities of at least half of the participants were shaped by educational capital (as a form of cultural capital), it is not clear that many of the participants had high levels of disposable income. In many ways, incidental sex work was framed as a way to ‘keep up’ with the neoliberal compulsion to consume or lead an ‘expensive lifestyle’. Sometimes this even included clients paying for expensive gifts or trips across Europe, something it was not possible to accurately ‘count’ in my analysis of the money made from incidental sex work (see 7.1). The extent to which anyone has a ‘choice’ over desiring such capitalist opulence in this culture remains an open question. Even participants who explicitly identified with a queer anti-capitalist politics (Will and Rick) said that the money was used for ‘a takeaway, earphones, a phone charger’, and ‘a good source of spending money’, respectively. Rather than indicating that the money was an ‘added bonus’, as some suggested, others viewed the ‘spending money’ for goods and services as something many young people (whether in education or not) could not otherwise afford.

Challenging any interpretation of economics as being the central or only incentive for incidental sex work, however, 31 of the 50 participants also described having *sexual motivations* such as the desire to ‘experiment’ or being ‘turned on’ by the notion of being paid for sex, alongside a sense of ‘boredom’ or ‘opportunity’ because they were online and looking for sex anyway (see 6.2 and 7.3). This speaks to a broader social shift which has been complimented by the proliferation of social media platforms for sexual minority men to ‘hook-up’, sometimes characterised as cultural sexualisation (Attwood, 2010; McNair, 2013; Attwood and Smith, 2013). In this context, the ability to ‘play’ with sexuality as a determined

leisure pursuit has emerged, distinct from traditional understandings of sex as only permissible within (heteronormative) emotionally committed, meaningful, long-term relationships. Yet as Smith and Mac (2018) have argued, ‘Blurring the lines between paid sex and recreational sex is a narrative readily available to many sex workers, as it is already present in much of the marketing directed at clients’ (p. 32), but under a capitalist regime in which many people have limited economic options, ‘sex work *may* be sex – but it is also *work*, in a world that allows no alternative’ (p. 39). In the next section, I will explore the extent to which incidental sex work blurs the boundaries between casual and commercial sex (see 3.2.5 and 3.4.4).

8.5 Blurring Boundaries Between Casual and Commercial Sex

The social problems of gendered violence and sexual exploitation have always been central feminist concerns. This has contributed to some of the tensions between strands of feminism—most clearly between ‘carceral’, ‘radical’, ‘sex worker exclusionary’, ‘socialist’, ‘liberal’ and ‘intersectional’ forms of feminism—when it comes to the topic of commercial sex. Although I have focused my critique on the former three in this thesis, they do draw attention to something which a rights-based critique often neglects: the *sex* aspects of sex work (see 3.4.4). Advocates of sex worker rights will often frame the issue as one of labour, whether that labour is ‘empowering’, ‘exploitative’, or ‘everyday’, the point is that sex work is a form of *work* comparable with many others, and thus those who identify as workers deserve the same rights and protections as everybody else. The response from exclusionary feminists tends to reject this premise by arguing that if money is involved, consent cannot be possible, making it a crime rather than a job. However, an almost parallel argument can be made that sex work is a form of *sex* comparable with many others; it can be empowering, exploitative, everyday, and done with or without consent. The question of consent is central to this thesis, given that many will see the fact that 13 of the 50 participants were paid for sex (by older men) below the age of 18 as ‘proof’ that consent was not possible in at least some of the encounters. This interpretation is based on a literalist reading of consent as defined by the law. However, as noted in the previous chapter, age of consent laws have a long history of being contested and changed for political purposes, especially for sexual minorities (see 7.8). Furthermore, as Bainham and Brooks-Gordon (2004) argued, current legislation (in the Sexual Offences Act, 2003) often ‘goes too far’ in its efforts to reduce harm, ‘potentially

criminalizing innocent experimentation by children and adolescents (contrary to the gathering autonomy which the law allows to them in other areas)’ (p. 266).

Such sweeping legislative change has historically been shaped by moral or sex panics, often stirred by the same groups that play a role in shaping dominant discourses: the media, policy makers, activists and academics (Lister, 2017; Vance, 1984). For example, Plummer (1995) has argued that:

‘Sex stories’ have frequently become the basis of hysteria, moral outrage and heated political argument over the past hundred years because their potency speaks to highly ambivalent and much wider cultural concerns than the ‘merely’ sexual. (p. 176)

Similarly, Rubin (1984) contextualised the charmed circle and outer limits by noting that:

Contemporary conflicts over sexual values and erotic conduct have much in common with the religious disputes of earlier centuries. They acquire immense symbolic weight... displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. (p. 267)

In these theories of sexual ‘panics’, or ‘conflicts’, or ‘wars’, those who belong to non-normative sexual minority groups are often used as distractions or scapegoats for other political disagreements. Those furthest from the ‘centre’ of the charmed circle are most likely to be the targets of symbolic, psychological, or physical violence—including state violence to ‘send a clear message’. Rubin’s suggested antidote to these ideological turf wars over sex was to replace the extreme binary view of bad/good sex, where only the latter was afforded any degree of complexity (more or less pleasurable, moral, or respected). Also inspired by Foucault, Sedgwick (1990) expanded this postmodern critique of the academic and cultural binary of hetero/homosexual. An important point here is that terms such as ‘consent’, ‘safety’, and even ‘sex’ have traditionally been defined by heterosexuals in ways which can erase or exclude queer understandings of these words which is different. This is not to say that consent or safety do not matter between sexual minority men, especially where there are social inequalities, only that we should think carefully about who is defining the discourse before imposing any moral absolutes on minority sexual behaviours or identities.

Also sometimes (mis)characterised as a ‘sex panic’—an incorrect analysis in my view, given that the ‘targets’ of such events do not belong to traditionally marginalised groups—the #MeToo movement has not only exposed how power differences (e.g. between

actors and producers, students and professors) can create vituperative environments and situations, but it has drawn attention (in some cases) to the difficulty distinguishing between ‘bad sex’ and ‘criminal sex’. Sex workers have not been given a prominent enough space in this international digital debate about sexual misconduct, mainly (although not exclusively) by older men with greater cultural, social, and economic capital, much like the clients in this study. With one exception (see 6.5), the participants in this study did not describe their incidental sex work encounters as lacking in consent. Some did describe the sex as being ‘unpleasant’ or ‘undesirable’, while others were entirely satisfied with it. The point here is that sex can be good, bad, and neutral in a multiplicity of ways. No simplistic or totalising view (e.g. that the participants have ‘false consciousness’, the clients are ‘abusers’, or sex between men of different generations is ‘morally reprehensible’) will adequately capture the complexity of these negotiated sexual encounters, or the ways in which digital media has expanded the possibilities for such encounters. The specificity of queer cultures is also central to this understanding of complexity, given that friendships, romantic, and sexual bonds between men of different generations is much more commonplace—arguably because there are fewer of us in the population, overall—whether those relationships lead to positive, negative, or neutral encounters and experiences.

Also central to this understanding of the *sex* aspects of sex work is the role of emotions. Among other feminist theorists, Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labour was radical because it transformed patriarchal understandings of ‘what counts’ as labour. That women’s care work in the domestic sphere was (and is) unpaid is a symbolic cultural gesture of its ‘inferiority’ to men’s work in the public sphere of ‘real’ work. Alongside its contribution to sex work scholarship (Sanders, 2005), this feminist critique raises important questions for the meaning of work and emotions more broadly. For example, why is no one saying, ‘emotions are too intimate to be sold’, ‘emotions are too sacred to exploit for profit’, or ‘emotions should only be expressed voluntarily and willingly, within committed relationships’? In a post-industrial, service-based economy, such arguments would fail because so much of our daily productivity is now spent on emotional labour. Some have referred to this as the ‘feminisation’ of the workplace, in part because traditionally masculine roles have disappeared or been replaced by more affective modes of production (see 3.2.4). If we were to explore the *emotional* aspects of emotional labour, one could argue that the blurring boundaries between emotions displayed or hidden at work, and at home (what Hochschild distinguished as ‘emotion work’), represent a postmodern intervention in

modernist definitions class, gender, and sexuality (see Chapter Three). Emotions were clearly central to how participants interpreted their experiences of incidental sex work, with some clients desiring or expecting a ‘boyfriend experience’, and some participants describing how the sex was less enjoyable because of the lack of emotional connection with their clients. The intersections between changing cultural meanings of ‘emotions’, ‘sex’, and ‘work’ are too intricate to fully address here, but future research should consider this as a core aspect of not only the *work* aspects, but also the *sex* aspects, of sex work.

8.6 The Limitations of Labelling

As the first ever empirical study of incidental sex work this thesis provides an insight into a range of sexual behaviours and identities—or lack of identities—which have implications for policy and research. Although I have focused on the experiences of sexual minority men, future research about incidental sex work should consider whether such behaviours are exclusive to gay, bisexual, and queer men, or whether women (including trans women) are participating in similarly occasional, opportunistic, online forms of sex work. As I noted in Chapter Four, finding participants for this study was (at times) a tricky process, and involved improvisation ‘in the field’. This supports the notion that incidental sex work may be a less visible, but more common, behaviour than other forms of sex work which researchers have investigated. The ‘covert’ or ‘hidden’ nature of incidental sex work also raises an ethical dilemma for the dissemination of this thesis. One question I am still seeking a resolution to is whether the results presented in this thesis should be published, at all. Given the potential for creeping digital censorship to expand further, the carceral state to justify greater disciplinary action, or policy makers to find new ‘folk devils’ to bolster moral panics, there is a danger in disseminating the existence of incidental sex work that a crackdown could occur, as it has historically when sexual minority groups have been named and shamed (by the state). On the other hand, as I have discussed in this conclusion, many of the themes which emerged from the narratives of the participants tended to support a pro-decriminalisation perspective, where—even if laws were broken—the state was viewed as an irrelevant actor, unable to police such behaviours (see 7.8).

Another dilemma I have grappled with throughout this doctoral research project has been the question of labels. As noted in the previous chapter, almost all of the participants distanced themselves from conventional sex worker labels, characterising their sexual

behaviours (rather than identities) as too irregular or unprofessional to be ‘counted’ as sex workers. When I proposed this project, it was titled ‘The Incidental Sex Worker’, but as I began to have conversations with these young men, and my theoretical perspective moved towards a postmodern critique of identity politics, it felt increasingly incorrect to impose a label on the participants which they did not see as representative. Instead, I have focused on ‘incidental sex work’ as a descriptive term (encompassing a wide range of commercial sexual behaviours, both direct and indirect), rather than a form of labelling. It is unclear whether any label would be appropriate for such a group, given the variety of their encounters, and how their narratives blurred boundaries between casual and commercial sex. Other than derogatory terms such as ‘slut’ or ‘whore’, there are few (neutral) labels to characterise people who have sex to explore and experiment with desire, whether casually or commercially, as many of the participants in this study did. The bolder suggestion that I will end on is to propose a general shift away from naming, labelling, or identifying sexual minority groups based on their differences from a perceived norm. As this thesis demonstrates, such norms are based on (usually incorrect) assumptions and stereotypes about what it means to ‘have sex’ and ‘sell sex’ in queer digital spaces.

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